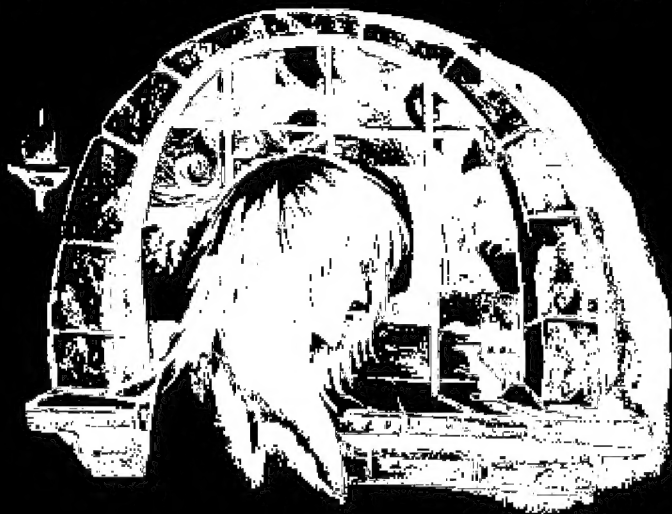


Harry Potter

AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN

WILLING

HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN



BY
J.K. ROWLING

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MARY GRANDPRÉ

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To JILL PREWETT AND
AINE KIELY,
THE GODMOTHERS OF SWING

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Owl Post Again

CHAPTER ONE



OWL POST

Harry Potter was a highly unusual boy in many ways. For one thing, he hated the summer holidays more than any other time of year. For another, he really wanted to do his homework but was forced to do it in secret, in the dead of night. And he also happened to be a wizard.

It was nearly midnight, and he was lying on his stomach in bed, the blankets drawn right over his head like a tent, a flashlight in one hand and a large leather-bound book (*A History of Magic* by Bathilda Bagshot) propped open against the pillow. Harry moved the tip of his eagle-feather quill down the page, frowning as he looked for something that would help him write his essay, “Witch Burning in the Fourteenth Century Was Completely Pointless — discuss.”

The quill paused at the top of a likely-looking paragraph. Harry

pushed his round glasses up the bridge of his nose, moved his flashlight closer to the book, and read:

Non-magic people (more commonly known as Muggles) were particularly afraid of magic in medieval times, but not very good at recognizing it. On the rare occasion that they did catch a real witch or wizard, burning had no effect whatsoever. The witch or wizard would perform a basic Flame-Freezing Charm and then pretend to shriek with pain while enjoying a gentle, tickling sensation. Indeed, Wendelin the Weird enjoyed being burned so much that she allowed herself to be caught no less than forty-seven times in various disguises.

Harry put his quill between his teeth and reached underneath his pillow for his ink bottle and a roll of parchment. Slowly and very carefully he unscrewed the ink bottle, dipped his quill into it, and began to write, pausing every now and then to listen, because if any of the Dursleys heard the scratching of his quill on their way to the bathroom, he'd probably find himself locked in the cupboard under the stairs for the rest of the summer.

The Dursley family of number four, Privet Drive, was the reason that Harry never enjoyed his summer holidays. Uncle Vernon, Aunt Petunia, and their son, Dudley, were Harry's only living relatives. They were Muggles, and they had a very medieval attitude toward magic. Harry's dead parents, who had been a witch and wizard themselves, were never mentioned under the Dursleys' roof. For years, Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon had hoped that if they kept

Harry as downtrodden as possible, they would be able to squash the magic out of him. To their fury, they had been unsuccessful. These days they lived in terror of anyone finding out that Harry had spent most of the last two years at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The most they could do, however, was to lock away Harry's spellbooks, wand, cauldron, and broomstick at the start of the summer break, and forbid him to talk to the neighbors.

This separation from his spellbooks had been a real problem for Harry, because his teachers at Hogwarts had given him a lot of holiday work. One of the essays, a particularly nasty one about shrinking potions, was for Harry's least favorite teacher, Professor Snape, who would be delighted to have an excuse to give Harry detention for a month. Harry had therefore seized his chance in the first week of the holidays. While Uncle Vernon, Aunt Petunia, and Dudley had gone out into the front garden to admire Uncle Vernon's new company car (in very loud voices, so that the rest of the street would notice it too), Harry had crept downstairs, picked the lock on the cupboard under the stairs, grabbed some of his books, and hidden them in his bedroom. As long as he didn't leave spots of ink on the sheets, the Dursleys need never know that he was studying magic by night.

Harry was particularly keen to avoid trouble with his aunt and uncle at the moment, as they were already in an especially bad mood with him, all because he'd received a telephone call from a fellow wizard one week into the school vacation.

Ron Weasley, who was one of Harry's best friends at Hogwarts, came from a whole family of wizards. This meant that he knew a lot

of things Harry didn't, but had never used a telephone before. Most unluckily, it had been Uncle Vernon who had answered the call.

"Vernon Dursley speaking."

Harry, who happened to be in the room at the time, froze as he heard Ron's voice answer.

"HELLO? HELLO? CAN YOU HEAR ME? I — WANT — TO — TALK — TO — HARRY — POTTER!"

Ron was yelling so loudly that Uncle Vernon jumped and held the receiver a foot away from his ear, staring at it with an expression of mingled fury and alarm.

"WHO IS THIS?" he roared in the direction of the mouthpiece. "WHO ARE YOU?"

"RON — WEASLEY!" Ron bellowed back, as though he and Uncle Vernon were speaking from opposite ends of a football field. "I'M — A — FRIEND — OF — HARRY'S — FROM — SCHOOL —"

Uncle Vernon's small eyes swiveled around to Harry, who was rooted to the spot.

"THERE IS NO HARRY POTTER HERE!" he roared, now holding the receiver at arm's length, as though frightened it might explode. "I DON'T KNOW WHAT SCHOOL YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT! NEVER CONTACT ME AGAIN! DON'T YOU COME NEAR MY FAMILY!"

And he threw the receiver back onto the telephone as if dropping a poisonous spider.

The fight that had followed had been one of the worst ever.

"HOW DARE YOU GIVE THIS NUMBER TO PEOPLE LIKE —"

PEOPLE LIKE YOU!" Uncle Vernon had roared, spraying Harry with spit.

Ron obviously realized that he'd gotten Harry into trouble, because he hadn't called again. Harry's other best friend from Hogwarts, Hermione Granger, hadn't been in touch either. Harry suspected that Ron had warned Hermione not to call, which was a pity, because Hermione, the cleverest witch in Harry's year, had Muggle parents, knew perfectly well how to use a telephone, and would probably have had enough sense not to say that she went to Hogwarts.

So Harry had had no word from any of his wizarding friends for five long weeks, and this summer was turning out to be almost as bad as the last one. There was just one very small improvement — after swearing that he wouldn't use her to send letters to any of his friends, Harry had been allowed to let his owl, Hedwig, out at night. Uncle Vernon had given in because of the racket Hedwig made if she was locked in her cage all the time.

Harry finished writing about Wendelin the Weird and paused to listen again. The silence in the dark house was broken only by the distant, grunting snores of his enormous cousin, Dudley. *It must be very late*, Harry thought. His eyes were itching with tiredness. Perhaps he'd finish this essay tomorrow night. . . .

He replaced the top of the ink bottle; pulled an old pillowcase from under his bed; put the flashlight, *A History of Magic*, his essay, quill, and ink inside it; got out of bed; and hid the lot under a loose floorboard under his bed. Then he stood up, stretched, and checked the time on the luminous alarm clock on his bedside table.

It was one o'clock in the morning. Harry's stomach gave a funny jolt. He had been thirteen years old, without realizing it, for a whole hour.

Yet another unusual thing about Harry was how little he looked forward to his birthdays. He had never received a birthday card in his life. The Dursleys had completely ignored his last two birthdays, and he had no reason to suppose they would remember this one.

Harry walked across the dark room, past Hedwig's large, empty cage, to the open window. He leaned on the sill, the cool night air pleasant on his face after a long time under the blankets. Hedwig had been absent for two nights now. Harry wasn't worried about her. She'd been gone this long before. But he hoped she'd be back soon — she was the only living creature in this house who didn't flinch at the sight of him.

Harry, though still rather small and skinny for his age, had grown a few inches over the last year. His jet-black hair, however, was just as it always had been — stubbornly untidy, whatever he did to it. The eyes behind his glasses were bright green, and on his forehead, clearly visible through his hair, was a thin scar, shaped like a bolt of lightning.

Of all the unusual things about Harry, this scar was the most extraordinary of all. It was not, as the Dursleys had pretended for ten years, a souvenir of the car crash that had killed Harry's parents, because Lily and James Potter had not died in a car crash. They had been murdered, murdered by the most feared Dark wizard for a hundred years, Lord Voldemort. Harry had escaped from the same attack with nothing more than a scar on his forehead, where

Voldemort's curse, instead of killing him, had rebounded upon its originator. Barely alive, Voldemort had fled. . . .

But Harry had come face-to-face with him at Hogwarts. Remembering their last meeting as he stood at the dark window, Harry had to admit he was lucky even to have reached his thirteenth birthday.

He scanned the starry sky for a sign of Hedwig, perhaps soaring back to him with a dead mouse dangling from her beak, expecting praise. Gazing absently over the rooftops, it was a few seconds before Harry realized what he was seeing.

Silhouetted against the golden moon, and growing larger every moment, was a large, strangely lopsided creature, and it was flapping in Harry's direction. He stood quite still, watching it sink lower and lower. For a split second he hesitated, his hand on the window latch, wondering whether to slam it shut. But then the bizarre creature soared over one of the street lamps of Privet Drive, and Harry, realizing what it was, leapt aside.

Through the window soared three owls, two of them holding up the third, which appeared to be unconscious. They landed with a soft *flump* on Harry's bed, and the middle owl, which was large and gray, keeled right over and lay motionless. There was a large package tied to its legs.

Harry recognized the unconscious owl at once — his name was Errol, and he belonged to the Weasley family. Harry dashed to the bed, untied the cords around Errol's legs, took off the parcel, and then carried Errol to Hedwig's cage. Errol opened one bleary eye, gave a feeble hoot of thanks, and began to gulp some water.

Harry turned back to the remaining owls. One of them, the large snowy female, was his own Hedwig. She, too, was carrying a parcel and looked extremely pleased with herself. She gave Harry an affectionate nip with her beak as he removed her burden, then flew across the room to join Errol.

Harry didn't recognize the third owl, a handsome tawny one, but he knew at once where it had come from, because in addition to a third package, it was carrying a letter bearing the Hogwarts crest. When Harry relieved this owl of its burden, it ruffled its feathers importantly, stretched its wings, and took off through the window into the night.

Harry sat down on his bed and grabbed Errol's package, ripped off the brown paper, and discovered a present wrapped in gold, and his first-ever birthday card. Fingers trembling slightly, he opened the envelope. Two pieces of paper fell out — a letter and a newspaper clipping.

The clipping had clearly come out of the wizarding newspaper, the *Daily Prophet*, because the people in the black-and-white picture were moving. Harry picked up the clipping, smoothed it out, and read:

MINISTRY OF MAGIC EMPLOYEE SCOOPS GRAND PRIZE

Arthur Weasley, Head of the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office at the Ministry of Magic, has won the annual *Daily Prophet* Grand Prize Galleon Draw.

A delighted Mr. Weasley told the *Daily Prophet*, "We

will be spending the gold on a summer holiday in Egypt, where our eldest son, Bill, works as a curse breaker for Gringotts Wizarding Bank.”

The Weasley family will be spending a month in Egypt, returning for the start of the new school year at Hogwarts, which five of the Weasley children currently attend.

Harry scanned the moving photograph, and a grin spread across his face as he saw all nine of the Weasleys waving furiously at him, standing in front of a large pyramid. Plump little Mrs. Weasley; tall, balding Mr. Weasley; six sons; and one daughter, all (though the black-and-white picture didn't show it) with flaming-red hair. Right in the middle of the picture was Ron, tall and gangling, with his pet rat, Scabbers, on his shoulder and his arm around his little sister, Ginny.

Harry couldn't think of anyone who deserved to win a large pile of gold more than the Weasleys, who were very nice and extremely poor. He picked up Ron's letter and unfolded it.

Dear Harry,

Happy birthday!

Look, I'm really sorry about that telephone call. I hope the Muggles didn't give you a hard time. I asked Dad, and he reckons I shouldn't have shouted.

It's amazing here in Egypt. Bill's taken us around all the tombs and you wouldn't believe the curses those old Egyptian wizards put on them. Mum wouldn't let Ginny come in the last one. There were all these mutant skeletons in there, of

Muggles who'd broken in and grown extra heads and stuff.

I couldn't believe it when Dad won the Daily Prophet Draw. Seven hundred Galleons! Most of it's gone on this trip, but they're going to buy me a new wand for next year.

Harry remembered only too well the occasion when Ron's old wand had snapped. It had happened when the car the two of them had been flying to Hogwarts had crashed into a tree on the school grounds.

We'll be back about a week before term starts and we'll be going up to London to get my wand and our new books. Any chance of meeting you there?

Don't let the Muggles get you down!

Try and come to London,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ron". The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent loop at the end of the 'n'.

P.S. Percy's Head Boy. He got the letter last week.

Harry glanced back at the photograph. Percy, who was in his seventh and final year at Hogwarts, was looking particularly smug. He had pinned his Head Boy badge to the fez perched jauntily on top of his neat hair, his horn-rimmed glasses flashing in the Egyptian sun.

Harry now turned to his present and unwrapped it. Inside was what looked like a miniature glass spinning top. There was another note from Ron beneath it.

Harry — this is a Pocket Sneakoscope. If there's someone untrustworthy around, it's supposed to light up and spin. Bill says it's rubbish sold for wizard tourists and isn't reliable, because it kept lighting up at dinner last night. But he didn't realize Fred and George had put beetles in his soup.

Bye —

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ron". The letters are fluid and connected, with a large 'R' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'n'.

Harry put the Pocket Sneakoscope on his bedside table, where it stood quite still, balanced on its point, reflecting the luminous hands of his clock. He looked at it happily for a few seconds, then picked up the parcel Hedwig had brought.

Inside this, too, there was a wrapped present, a card, and a letter, this time from Hermione.

Dear Harry,

Ron wrote to me and told me about his phone call to your Uncle Vernon. I do hope you're all right.

I'm on holiday in France at the moment and I didn't know how I was going to send this to you — what if they'd opened it at customs? — but then Hedwig turned up! I think she wanted to make sure you got something for your birthday for a change. I bought your present by owl-order; there was an advertisement in the Daily Prophet (I've been getting it delivered; it's so good to keep up with what's going on in the wizarding world). Did you see that picture of Ron and his

family a week ago? I bet he's learning loads. I'm really jealous — the ancient Egyptian wizards were fascinating.

There's some interesting local history of witchcraft here, too. I've rewritten my whole History of Magic essay to include some of the things I've found out. I hope it's not too long — it's two rolls of parchment more than Professor Binns asked for.

Ron says he's going to be in London in the last week of the holidays. Can you make it? Will your aunt and uncle let you come? I really hope you can. If not, I'll see you on the Hogwarts Express on September first!

Love from

Hermione

P.S. Ron says Percy's Head Boy. I'll bet Percy's really pleased. Ron doesn't seem too happy about it.

Harry laughed as he put Hermione's letter aside and picked up her present. It was very heavy. Knowing Hermione, he was sure it would be a large book full of very difficult spells — but it wasn't. His heart gave a huge bound as he ripped back the paper and saw a sleek black leather case, with silver words stamped across it, reading *Broomstick Servicing Kit*.

"Wow, Hermione!" Harry whispered, unzipping the case to look inside.

There was a large jar of Fleetwood's High-Finish Handle Polish, a pair of gleaming silver Tail-Twig Clippers, a tiny brass compass to clip on your broom for long journeys, and a *Handbook of Do-It-*

Yourself Broomcare.

Apart from his friends, the thing that Harry missed most about Hogwarts was Quidditch, the most popular sport in the magical world — highly dangerous, very exciting, and played on broomsticks. Harry happened to be a very good Quidditch player; he had been the youngest person in a century to be picked for one of the Hogwarts House teams. One of Harry's most prized possessions was his Nimbus Two Thousand racing broom.

Harry put the leather case aside and picked up his last parcel. He recognized the untidy scrawl on the brown paper at once: This was from Hagrid, the Hogwarts gamekeeper. He tore off the top layer of paper and glimpsed something green and leathery, but before he could unwrap it properly, the parcel gave a strange quiver, and whatever was inside it snapped loudly — as though it had jaws.

Harry froze. He knew that Hagrid would never send him anything dangerous on purpose, but then, Hagrid didn't have a normal person's view of what was dangerous. Hagrid had been known to befriend giant spiders, buy vicious, three-headed dogs from men in pubs, and sneak illegal dragon eggs into his cabin.

Harry poked the parcel nervously. It snapped loudly again. Harry reached for the lamp on his bedside table, gripped it firmly in one hand, and raised it over his head, ready to strike. Then he seized the rest of the wrapping paper in his other hand and pulled.

And out fell — a book. Harry just had time to register its handsome green cover, emblazoned with the golden title *The Monster Book of Monsters*, before it flipped onto its edge and scuttled sideways along the bed like some weird crab.

“Uh-oh,” Harry muttered.

The book toppled off the bed with a loud clunk and shuffled rapidly across the room. Harry followed it stealthily. The book was hiding in the dark space under his desk. Praying that the Dursleys were still fast asleep, Harry got down on his hands and knees and reached toward it.

“Ouch!”

The book snapped shut on his hand and then flapped past him, still scuttling on its covers. Harry scrambled around, threw himself forward, and managed to flatten it. Uncle Vernon gave a loud, sleepy grunt in the room next door.

Hedwig and Errol watched interestedly as Harry clamped the struggling book tightly in his arms, hurried to his chest of drawers, and pulled out a belt, which he buckled tightly around it. The *Monster Book* shuddered angrily, but could no longer flap and snap, so Harry threw it down on the bed and reached for Hagrid’s card.

Dear Harry,

Happy birthday!

Think you might find this useful for next year. Won't say no more here. Tell you when I see you.

Hope the Muggles are treating you right.

All the best,

Hagrid

It struck Harry as ominous that Hagrid thought a biting book would come in useful, but he put Hagrid’s card up next to Ron’s and

Hermione's, grinning more broadly than ever. Now there was only the letter from Hogwarts left.

Noticing that it was rather thicker than usual, Harry slit open the envelope, pulled out the first page of parchment within, and read:

Dear Mr. Potter,

Please note that the new school year will begin on September the first. The Hogwarts Express will leave from King's Cross station, platform nine and three-quarters, at eleven o'clock.

Third years are permitted to visit the village of Hogsmeade on certain weekends. Please give the enclosed permission form to your parent or guardian to sign.

A list of books for next year is enclosed.

Yours sincerely,

Professor M. McGonagall

Deputy Headmistress

Harry pulled out the Hogsmeade permission form and looked at it, no longer grinning. It would be wonderful to visit Hogsmeade on weekends; he knew it was an entirely wizarding village, and he had never set foot there. But how on earth was he going to persuade Uncle Vernon or Aunt Petunia to sign the form?

He looked over at the alarm clock. It was now two o'clock in the morning.

Deciding that he'd worry about the Hogsmeade form when he

woke up, Harry got back into bed and reached up to cross off another day on the chart he'd made for himself, counting down the days left until his return to Hogwarts. Then he took off his glasses and lay down, eyes open, facing his three birthday cards.

Extremely unusual though he was, at that moment Harry Potter felt just like everyone else — glad, for the first time in his life, that it was his birthday.

Harry Potter

EN DIE GEVANGENE
VAN AZKABAN



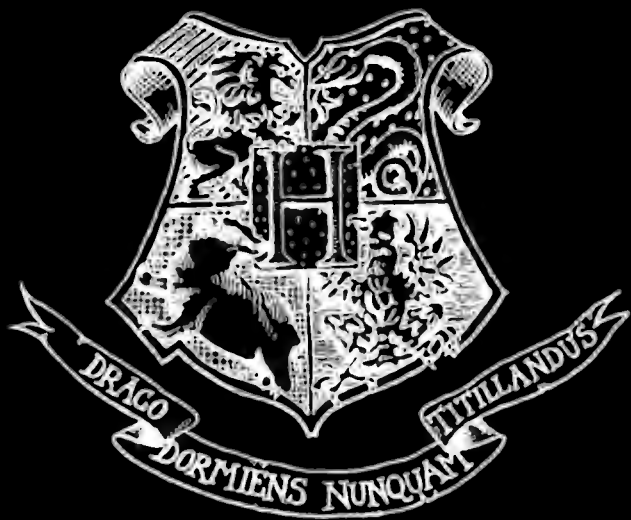
ROWLING

*Titels beskikbaar in die Harry Potter-reeks
(in leesvolgorde)*

Harry Potter en die Towenaar se Steen
Harry Potter en die Kamer van Geheimenisse
Harry Potter en die Gevangene van Azkaban
Harry Potter en die Beker Vol Vuur

HARRY POTTER

en die Gevangene van Azkaban



J.K. Rowling
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Geen gedeelte van hierdie boek mag sonder skriftelike verlof van die uitgewer gereproduseer of in enige vorm of deur enige elektroniese of meganiese middel weergegee word nie, hetsy deur fotokopiëring, plaat- of bandopname, vermikrofilming of enige ander stelsel vir inligtingbewaring

Vir Jill Prewett en Aine Kiely,
Die peetma's van Swing



Uilepos

Harry Potter is in baie opsigte 'n ongewone seun. In die eerste plek haat hy die somervakansies meer as enige ander tyd van die jaar. In die tweede plek wil hy regtig graag sy huiswerk doen, maar hy moet dit in die middel van die nag en in die geheim doen. Wat meer is, hy is ook 'n towenaar.

Dit is amper middernag en hy lê plat op sy maag op sy bed, met die komberse soos 'n tent oor sy kop, 'n flits in een hand en 'n groot leerbandboek (*Die Geskiedenis van Towerkuns*, deur Adelbert Gorrelgatus) oop teen sy kussing gestut. Harry trek die punt van sy arendveerpen met 'n frons by die bladsy af terwyl hy na iets soek wat hom met sy opstel kan help: "Die verbranding van hekse in die veertiende eeu was heeltemal sinneeloos – bespreek."

Die veerpen huiwer boaan 'n paragraaf wat lyk of dit moontlikhede kan hê. Harry druk sy ronde brilletjie terug op sy neus, hou die flits nader aan die boek en lees:

In die Middeleeue was niemagiëse mense (meer algemeen bekend as Moggels) besonder bang vir die towerkuns, maar nie juis in staat om toewery te herken nie. Hulle het slegs by hoë uitsondering 'n egte heks of towenaar gevang, en dan het verbranding selde die gewenste uitwerking gehad. Die heks of towenaar sou bloot 'n eenvoudige Vlamvries-Towerspel uitvoer en gil en skree asof intense pyn verduur word, terwyl dit in werklikheid bloot soos 'n ligte gekielie gevoel het. Endelin die Eienaar-dige het dit so gentet om verbrand te word dat sy haarself nie minder as sewe-en-veertig keer in verskillende vormommings laat vang het nie.

Harry byt sy veerpen tussen sy tande vas en soek onder sy kussing na sy inkbottel en 'n rol perkament. Hy skroef die inkbottel stadig en baie versigtig oop, doop sy veerpen daarin en begin skryf terwyl hy elke nou en dan vir 'n rukkie ophou om te luister, want as enige van die Dursleys badkamer toe gaan en die gekrap van sy veerpen moet hoor, sal hy na alle waarskynlikheid vir die res van die somer in die kas onder die trappe opgesluit word.

Die Dursley-gesin van Ligusterlaan nommer vier is die rede waarom Harry die somervakansies nog nooit geniet het nie. Oom Vernon, tant Petunia en hul seun, Dudley, is Harry se enigste oorlewende familie. Hulle is Moggels, en hulle het 'n baie Middeleeuse houding teenoor die towerkuns. Harry se oorlede ouers, wat ook 'n heks en 'n towenaar was, se name word nooit in die Dursleys se huis genoem nie. Tant Petunia en oom Vernon het al die jare gehoop dat as hulle vir Harry behoorlik verdruk, hulle sy towerkragte uit hom sal smoor. Tot hul ergernis het hulle nie daarin geslaag nie, en nou lewe hulle in die grootste vrees dat iemand sal agterkom dat Harry reeds vir amper twee jaar na die Hogwarts Skool vir Heksery en Towerkuns gaan. Al wat die Dursleys deesdae kan doen, is om Harry se toorboeke, towerstaf, hekseketel en besemstok aan die begin van die somervakansie weg te sluit en om hom te verbied om met die bure te praat.

Om so van sy toorboeke geskei te wees, is 'n groot probleem vir Harry, want sy onderwysers by Hogwarts het vir hom stapels huiswerk gegee. Een van die opstelle, 'n besonder aaklige een oor Krimptowerdrankies, is vir professor Snerp, Harry se mins geliefde onderwyser, wat dit omtrent sal geniet as hy Harry vir 'n maand lank detensie kan laat doen. Dus het Harry in die eerste week van die vakansie sy kans aangegryp. Terwyl oom Vernon, tant Petunia en Dudley voor in die tuin was om oom Vernon se nuwe maatskappymotor te bewonder (in baie harde stemme sodat die hele straat moet hoor), het Harry met die trappe afgesluip, die slot aan die kas onder die trappe oopgesteek en 'n paar van sy boeke gegryp en in sy kamer gaan wegsteek. Solank hy nie inkvlekke op die lakens mors nie, sal die Dursleys nooit weet dat hy sy towerhuiswerk snags doen nie.

Harry is op die oomblik baie gretig om moeilikheid met sy oom en tante te vermy, want hulle is klaar omgekrap omdat hy, een week na die skool gesluit het, 'n telefoonoproep van een van sy towenaarsvriende gekry het.

Ron Weasley, een van Harry se beste maats by Hogwarts, se hele familie is towenaars. Dit beteken dat hy 'n klomp goed weet wat Harry nie weet nie, maar ook dat hy nog nooit tevore 'n telefoon gebruik het nie. Ongelukkig was dit oom Vernon wat die oproep beantwoord het.

"Vernon Dursley."

Harry, wat toevallig in die vertrek was, het stokstyl geword toe hy Ron se stem hoor.

"HALLO? HALLO? KAN JY MY HOOR? EK – WIL – MET – HARRY – POTTER – PRAAT!"

Ron het so hard geskree dat oom Vernon die lug in gespring, die gehoorstuk 'n voet van sy oor af gehou en met 'n mengsel van skok en woede daarna gestaar het.

"WIE IS DIT?" het hy in die mondstuk se rigting gebrul. "WIE IS JY?"

"RON – WEASLEY!" het Ron teruggebulder asof hy en oom Vernon

om 'n sokkerveld na mekaar skree. "EK - IS - 'N - VRIEND - VAN - HARRY - VAN - DIE - SKOOL -"

Oom Vernon se klein ogies het na Harry gedraai, waar hy op een plek weggenael gestaan het.

"HIER WOON GEEN HARRY POTTER NIE!" het hy gebrul, terwyl hy die gehoorstuk 'n volle armlengte van hom af gehou het, asof hy bang was dit sal ontplof. "EK WEET NIE VAN WATTER SKOOL JY PRAAT NIE! MOET NOOIT WEER HIERHEEN BEL NIE! MOET NOOIT NABY MY OF MY GESIN KOM NIE!"

Toe het hy die gehoorstuk op die telefoon neergegooi asof dit 'n giftige spinnekop was.

Die rusie wat hierop gevolg het, was een van die ergstes ooit.

"HOE DURF JY HIERDIE NOMMER GEE VIR MENSE SOOS - MENSE SOOS JY!" het oom Vernon gebrul sodat sy spoeg oor Harry gespat het.

Ron moes besef het dat hy vir Harry in die sop laat beland het, want hy het nie weer gebel nie. Harry se ander beste maat van Hogwarts, Hermien la Grange, het ook nog nie van haar laat hoor nie. Harry vermoed dat Ron Hermien gewaarsku het om hom nie te bel nie, wat 'n jammerte is, want Hermien, die slimste heks in Harry se jaar, het Moggelouers, weet presies hoe om 'n telefoon te gebruik en sou heel waarskynlik genoeg gesonde verstand gehad het om nie te sê dat sy in Hogwarts is nie.

Vir vyf lang weke het Harry dus nog nie 'n woord van sy towenaarsvriende gehoor nie, en hierdie vakansie is besig om net so sleg soos die vorige een te word. Daar is net een baie klein verbetering: na Harry belowe het dat hy haar nie sal gebruik om briewe na enige van sy vriende te stuur nie, is hy toegelaat om sy uil, Hedwig, snags uit te laat. Oom Vernon het hiertoe ingestem bloot omdat Hedwig 'n verskriklike kabaal maak as sy die hele tyd in haar kou toegesluit word.

Harry hou op skryf oor Endelin die Eienaardige en luister eers gou weer. Die stilte in die donker huis word net deur die veraf, rammelende gesnork van sy enorme neef, Dudley, onderbreek. Dit moet baie laat wees. Harry se oë jeuk so vaak is hy. Dalk moet hy die opstel eerder die volgende aand klaarmaak.

Hy draai die inkbottel se doppie toe, haal 'n ou kussingsloop onder sy bed uit, sit sy flits, *Die Geskiedenis van Towerkuns*, sy opstel, veerpen en ink daarin, klim uit die bed en steek die hele spul onder 'n los vloerplank onder sy bed weg. Toe kom hy orent, rek homself uit en kyk na die wekker op sy bedkassie se verligte wyserplaat om te sien hoe laat dit is.

Dit is eenuur die oggend. Harry se maag gee 'n snaakse ruk. Reeds vir 'n volle uur is hy dertien jaar oud, en hy het dit nie eens besef nie.

Nog 'n ongewone ding aan Harry is dat hy so min na sy verjaardag uitsien. In sy hele lewe het hy nog nooit 'n verjaardagkaartjie gekry nie. Die Dursleys het sy laaste twee verjaardae heeltemal geïgnoreer en hy

kan aan geen rede dink waarom hulle hierdie een sal onthou nie.

Harry stap deur die donker kamer, verby Hedwig se groot, leë kou na die oop venster. Hy leun oor die vensterbank en die koel naglug is baie aangenaam na hy so lank onder die komberse was. Hedwig is reeds twee nagte lank weg. Harry is nie bekommerd oor haar nie – sy was al langer as dit weg – maar hy hoop dat sy binnekort sal terugkom. Sy is die enigste lewende wese in hierdie huis wat nie terugdeins as sy hom sien nie.

Hoewel Harry steeds redelik klein en maer vir sy ouderdom is, het hy die afgelope jaar wel 'n paar sentimeters gegroei. Sy inkswart hare lyk egter nog net soos altyd: weerbarstig deurmekaar, maak nie saak wat hy daarmee probeer doen nie. Die oë agter sy brilglase is heldergroen, en op sy voorkop, duidelik sigbaar deur sy hare, is 'n dun litteken in die vorm van 'n weerligstraal.

Van al die ongewone dinge aan Harry is hierdie litteken die vreemdste. Dit is nie, soos die Dursleys vir tien jaar voorgegee het, die gevolg van die motorongeluk waarin Harry se ouers dood is nie, want Lily en James Potter het nie in 'n motorongeluk gesterf nie. Hulle is vermoor, vermoor deur die mees gevreesde Donker Towenaar van die afgelope honderd jaar, die heer Woldemort. Tydens hierdie aanval het Harry met niks ergers as die litteken op sy voorkop ontkom, want pleks dat die heer Woldemort se vloek hom doodgemaak het, het dit op hom teruggekaats. Skaars lewend, het Woldemort gevlug.

Sedertdien het Harry by Hogwarts van aangesig tot aangesig met hom te doen gehad. Hier waar hy voor die donker venster staan en aan daardie laaste ontmoeting terugdink, moet Harry erken dat hy gelukkig is om hoegenaamd 'n dertiende verjaardag te kan hê.

Hy staar na die sterreheemel vir 'n teken van Hedwig. Miskien sweef sy reeds sierlik terug huis toe met 'n dooie muis in haar snawel, in die verwagting dat hy haar gaan prys. Diep ingedagte tuur hy oor die dakke, en dit neem 'n hele paar sekondes voor Harry besef wat hy sien.

Duidelik afgeteken teen die goue maan is 'n groot en grillige windske-we gedierte wat al hoe groter word en reguit na Harry toe aankom. Harry staan botstil en kyk hoe dit laer en laer sak. Vir 'n breukdeel van 'n sekonde aarsel hy met sy hand op die vensterknip terwyl hy wonder of hy die venster moet toemaak of nie, maar dan seil die vreemde gedoente oor een van die straatlampe in Ligusterlaan, en toe Harry besef wat dit is, spring hy uit die pad.

Drie uile seil deur die venster, twee van hulle ondersteun die derde, wat lyk of hy bewusteloos is. Hulle land met 'n sagte *flop* op Harry se bed, en die middelste uil, wat groot en grys is, rol om en bly roerloos lê. 'n Groot pakkie is aan sy bene vasgemaak.

Harry herken die bewustelose uil onmiddellik – sy naam is Errol, en hy behoort aan die Weasley-gesin. Harry storm dadelik na sy bed toe, maak

die toue om Errol se bene los, haal die pakkie af en dra vir Errol na Hedwig se kou. Errol maak een leepoog oop, gee 'n flou hoe-hoe om dankie te sê en begin dadelik water drink.

Nou draai Harry na die ander twee uile. Een van hulle, 'n groot sneeu-uilwylie, is sy eie Hedwig. Sy dra ook 'n pakkie en lyk besonder in haar skik met haarself. Sy gee Harry 'n liefdevolle pik met haar snawel terwyl hy die pakkie losmaak, en vlieg dan deur die vertrek na Errol toe.

Harry herken die derde uil glad nie. Dis 'n besonder mooi bruingeel voel, maar hy weet dadelik waarvandaan dit kom, want tesame met 'n derde pakkie dra dit ook 'n brief met Hogwarts se wapen op. Toe Harry hierdie uil se pos afhaal, pof die uil sy vere belangrik op, strek sy vlerke, en vlieg deur die venster en verdwyn in die nag.

Harry gaan sit op sy bed, tel Errol se pakkie op, skeur die bruinpapier af en vind 'n present wat in goue papier toegedraai is, sowel as sy heel eerste verjaardagkaart. Met vingers wat effens bewe, maak hy die koevertpoppie oop. Twee stukke papier val uit – 'n brief en 'n koerantknipsel.

Die knipsel kom duidelik uit die towenaars se koerant, die *Daaglikse Profeet*, want die mense in die swart-wit foto's beweeg. Harry tel die knipsel op, druk dit plat en lees:

WERKNEMER BY MINISTERIE VIR TOWERKUNS WEN GROOT PRYS

Arthur Weasley, Hoof van die Kantoor vir die Misbruik van Moggelartefakte by die Ministerie vir Towerkuns, is die wenner van die jaarlikse Boerpot Galjoenlotery, soos aangebied deur die Daaglikse Profeet.

'n Uitgelate mnr. Weasley het as volg aan die Daaglikse Profeet gesê: "Ons gaan die goud op 'n somervakansie in Egipte spandeer, waar ons oudste seun, Bill, werksaam is as vloekbreker vir die Edelgolt Toweenaarsbank."

Die Weasley-gesin sal 'n maand in Egipte deurbring tot met die aanvang van die nuwe skooljaar by Hogwarts, waar vyf van die Weasley-kindertjies tans op skool is.

Harry bekyk die bewegende foto en 'n glimlag sprei oor sy gesig toe hy sien hoe al nege Weasleys, wat voor 'n groot piramide staan, entoesiasties vir hom waai. Die gesette mev. Weasley is daar, sowel as die lang, effens bles mnr. Weasley, ses seuns en een dogter, almal (hoewel dit nie op die swart-wit foto wys nie) met vlamrooi hare. Ron, lank en lomp, staan reg in die middel van die foto met sy arm om sy kleinsus, Ginny, en sy troetelrot, Skille, op sy skouer.

Harry kan aan niemand anders dink wat dit meer verdien om so 'n groot stapel goud te wen nie. Die Weasleys is baie gaaf en verskriklik arm. Hy tel Ron se brief op en vou dit oop.

Liewe Harry

Veels geluk met jou verjaardag!

Luister, ek is regtig jammer oor daardie telefoonoproep. Ek hoop die Moggels het jou nie 'n harde tyd gegee nie. Ek het my pa gevra en hy reken ek moes nie so geskree het nie.

Dis wonderlik hier in Egipte. Bill het ons deur al die grafkelders geneem en jy het nie 'n idee watter vloeke daardie ou Egiptiese towenaars op hulle gesit het nie. My ma wou nie toelaat dat Ginny by die laaste een ingaan nie. Daar was allerhande gemuteerde geraamtes van Moggels wat ingebreek en ekstra koppe en goed gegroei het.

Ek kon dit nie glo toe my pa die Daaglikse Profeet se lotery gewen het nie. Sewehonderd Galjoene! Die meeste daarvan is vir hierdie vakansie gebruik, maar hulle gaan vir my 'n nuwe towerstaf koop vir volgende jaar.

Harry onthou die dag toe Ron se ou towerstaf in die middel geknak het maar alte goed. Dit het gebeur toe die motor waarin hulle twee Hogwarts toe gevlieg het teen 'n boom op die skoolterrein gebots het.

Ons sal 'n week voor die kwartaal begin weer terug wees en moet Londen toe gaan om my towerstaf en ons nuwe boeke te koop. Is daar 'n kans dat jy daar kan wees?

Moenie dat die Moggels jou onderkry nie!

Doen jou bes om Londen toe te kom.

Ron

Ns. Percy is Hoofseun. Hy het die brief laas week gekry.

Harry kyk weer na die foto. Percy, wat in sy sewende en laaste jaar op Hogwarts is, lyk besonder selfvoldaan. Sy Hoofseun-lapelwapen is vasgespeld aan die kofia wat windmakerig skeef op sy netjiese hare sit, en sy ronderaambril flits in die Egiptiese son.

Uiteindelik kan Harry sy present oopmaak. Binne-in is iets wat soos 'n miniatuur-glastol lyk. Onderaan is nog 'n nota van Ron

Harry – dit is 'n Kulklikker, 'n sakmodel. As daar iemand naby is wat onbetroubaar is, dan moet 'n lig aangaan en dit moet begin spin. Bill sê dis gemors wat aan towenaartoeriste verkoop word en dat dit nie betroubaar is nie, want dit het gisteraand tydens aandete die hele tyd afgestaan. Wat hy nie weet nie, is dat Fred en George kewers in sy sop gesit het.

Tarra – Ron

Harry sit die Kulklikker op sy bedkassie neer, waar dit doodstil, op sy punt gebalanseer, bly staan sodat die verligte arms van die wekker daarin weerkaats. Vir 'n paar oomblikke kyk hy hoogs in sy skik daarna en toe tel hy die pakkie op wat Hedwig gebring het.

Hierbinne is ook 'n toegedraaide present, 'n kaart en 'n brief, hierdie een van Hermien.

Liewe Harry,

Ron het aan my geskryf en my van sy oproep na jou oom Vernon vertel. Ek hoop jy lewe nog.

Ek is op die oomblik met vakansie in Frankryk en het nie geweet hoe om dit vir jou te stuur nie – wat as hulle dit oopmaak by die Doeane? maar toe daag Hedwig hier op! Ek dink sy wou seker maak dat jy vir 'n verandering iets vir jou verjaardag kry. Ek het jou present per uilbestelling gekoop; daar was 'n advertensie in die Daaglikse Profeet (ek laat dit aflewer, dis goed om op hoogte te bly met wat in die towerwêreld aangaan). Het jy verlede week daardie foto van Ron-hulle gesien? Ek wed hy leer verskriklik baie, ek is regtig jaloers – die antieke Egiptiese towenaars is fassinerend.

Hier is ook heelwat interessante plaaslike geskiedenis oor die towerkuns. Ek het my hele opstel vir die Geskiedenis van Towerkuns oorgeskryf sodat ek die dinge wat ek uitgevind het, kan byvoeg. Ek hoop dis nie nou te lank nie, dis twee rolle perkament langer as waarvoor professor Binns gevra het.

Ron sê hy gaan die laaste week van die vakansie in Londen wees. Sal jy dit kan maak? Sal jou oom en tante jou laat gaan? Ek hoop regtig so. Indien nie, sien ek jou die eerste September op die Hogwarts Express.

Met liefde van
Hermien

Ns. Ron sê Percy is Hoofseun. Ek wed Percy is in sy noppies. Ron klink nie baie bly nie.

Harry lag weer toe hy Hermien se brief eenkant neersit en haar present optel. Dit is baie swaar. Hy ken vir Hermien en hy is seker dat dit 'n groot boek vol ingewikkelde towerspreuke is – maar dit is nie. Sy hart spring woes toe hy die papier afskeur en 'n gladde, blink leertas uithaal waarop hierdie woorde in silwer gedruk is: *Besemstok Versienstel*.

“Sjoe, Hermien!” fluister Harry terwyl hy die tas ooprits om binne-in te kyk.

Daar is 'n yslike fles vol van Vlughoudt se Hoëglans Steelpolitoer, 'n paar glinsterende silwer Besemgrasknippers, 'n klein koperkompas om

aan jou besem vas te knyp tydens lang reise en 'n *Handboek van Doen-dit-sel*f Besemsorg.

Buiten sy vriende is die een ding by Hogwarts wat Harry die meeste mis, Kwiddiek, die gewildste sport in die towerwêreld – dis hoogs gevaarlik, uiters opwindend en word op besemstokke gespeel. Harry is toevallig 'n baie goeie Kwiddiekspeeler; hy is die jongste persoon die afgelope eeu om vir een van Hogwarts se huisspanne te speel. Een van Harry se trotsste besittings is sy Nimbus Tweeduisend resiesbesem.

Harry sit die leertas eenkant neer en tel die laaste pakkie op. Hy herken die slordige gekrabbel op die bruinpapier onmiddellik: dit kom van Hagrid, Hogwarts se boswagter. Hy skeur die boonste laag van die papier af en sien iets wat groen en leeragtig is, maar nog voor hy dit behoorlik kan oopmaak, bewe die pakkie op 'n vreemde manier en wat ook al binne-in is, maak 'n klappgeluid – soos iets wat kake het.

Harry vries. Hy weet Hagrid sal nie aspris iets gevaarliks vir hom stuur nie, maar Hagrid dink nie soos gewone mense oor wat gevaarlik is of nie. Hagrid is vriende met reusespinnekoppe, hy koop bloeddorstige, driekoppige honde by mans in kroë en hy smokkel onwettige drake-eiers na sy hut.

Harry druk-druk senuagtig aan die pakkie. Dit klap weer hard. Harry steek sy hand uit na die lamp op sy bedkassie, vat dit stewig vas en lig dit met een hand bo sy kop, reg om te slaan. Toe gryp hy die res van die papier in sy ander hand en pluk dit af.

Uit val – 'n boek. Harry het net tyd om die mooi groen buiteblad wat met 'n goue titel versier is, raak te sien, toe *Die Monsterboek van Monsters* op sy kant draai en skeef-skeef oor die bed wegskarrel soos 'n baie eienaardige krap.

“Oe-hoe,” stamel Harry.

Die boek tuimel met 'n harde klonkgeluid van die bed af en skuifel blitsig oor die vloer. Harry volg dit behoedsaam. Die boek kruip in die donker ruimte onder sy lessenaar weg. Harry bid dat die Dursleys vas moet slaap, toe sak hy af op sy hande en knieë en steek sy hand na die boek toe uit.

“Eina!” Die boek klap toe op sy hand en flap dan verby hom, nog steeds skuifelend op sy buiteblaaie. Harry skarrel agterna, gooi homself op die boek en slaag daarin om dit plat te trek. In die kamer langsaan maak oom Vernon 'n harde, slaperige snorkgeluid.

Hedwig en Errol kyk met groot belangstelling hoe Harry, met die worstelende boek styf in sy arms, 'n gordel uit sy laaikas haal wat hy stewig om die boek vasmaak. Die Monsterboek sidder van woede, maar dit kan nie meer flap of klap nie, dus gooi Harry dit op sy bed neer en tel Hagrid se kaart op.

Liewe Harry,

Lekker verjaar!

Het gedink dit sal handig te pas kom in die komende jaar. Gaan niks meer sê nie. Sal jou alles vertel wanneer ek jou sien.

Hoop die Moggels behandel jou goed.

Net die beste,

Hagrid

Daar Hagrid kan dink dat 'n bytende boek handig te pas kan kom, klink vir Harry ietwat onheilspellend, maar hy sit Hagrid se kaart langs Ron en Hermien s'n neer en glimlag nog breër as tevore. Nou is daar nog net die brief van Hogwarts oor.

Toe hy dit oopskeur, sien Harry dat dit heelwat dikker as gewoonlik is. Hy haal die eerste perkamentvel uit en lees:

Geagte mnr. Potter,

Neem asseblief kennis dat die nuwe skooljaar op die eerste September begin. Die Hogwarts Express vertrek om elfuur vanaf platform nege-en-'n-driekwart op King's Cross-stasie.

Derdejaars word toegelaat om op sekere naweke na die naburige dorp, Hogsmeade, te gaan. Gee asseblief die ingeslote toestemmingsvorm aan u ouers of voogde om te teken.

'n Lys boeke vir die volgende jaar word ingesluit.

Die uwe,

Professor M. McGonagall

Onderhoof

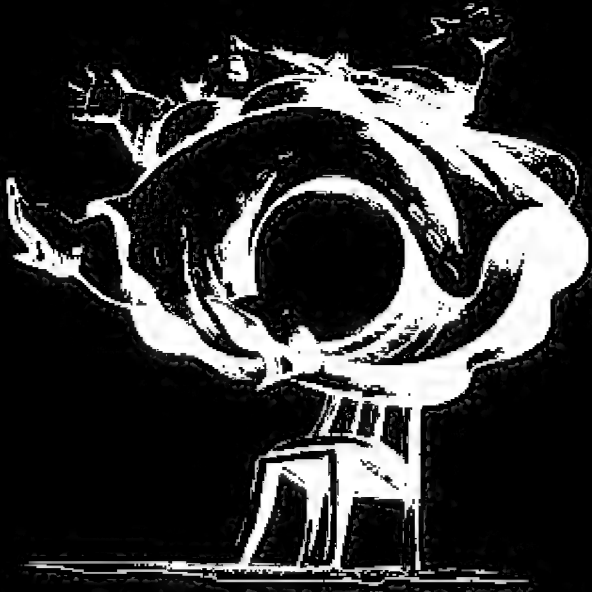
Toe Harry die Hogsmeade-toestemmingsvorm uithaal en daarna kyk, verdwyn sy glimlag. Dit sal wonderlik wees om oor naweke na Hogsmeade te mag gaan; hy weet dat die hele dorpie 'n towenaarsdorp is, en hy was nog nooit daar nie. Hoe op aarde gaan hy vir oom Vernon en tant Petunia oorreed om die vorm te teken?

Hy kyk na sy wekker. Dit is reeds twee-uur in die oggend.

Harry besluit om hom eers weer oor die Hogsmeade-toestemmingsvorm te bekommer wanneer hy wakker word, dus klim hy terug in die bed en steek sy hand uit om nog 'n dag af te merk op die kaart wat hy vir homself gemaak het, en waarop hy die dae aftel tot hy weer terug Hogwarts toe kan gaan. Toe haal hy sy bril af en gaan lê, maar sy oë is oop en sy gesig is na sy verjaardagkaarte gedraai.

Ongewoon soos hy mag wees, voel Harry Potter op hierdie oomblik net soos alle ander mense: bly, vir die eerste keer in sy lewe, dat dit sy verjaardag is.

CHAPTER TWO



AUNT MARGE'S BIG MISTAKE

Harry went down to breakfast the next morning to find the three Dursleys already sitting around the kitchen table. They were watching a brand-new television, a welcome-home-for-the-summer present for Dudley, who had been complaining loudly about the long walk between the fridge and the television in the living room. Dudley had spent most of the summer in the kitchen, his piggy little eyes fixed on the screen and his five chins wobbling as he ate continually.

Harry sat down between Dudley and Uncle Vernon, a large, beefy man with very little neck and a lot of mustache. Far from wishing Harry a happy birthday, none of the Dursleys made any sign that they

had noticed Harry enter the room, but Harry was far too used to this to care. He helped himself to a piece of toast and then looked up at the reporter on the television, who was halfway through a report on an escaped convict:

“... The public is warned that Black is armed and extremely dangerous. A special hot line has been set up, and any sighting of Black should be reported immediately.”

“No need to tell us *he's* no good,” snorted Uncle Vernon, staring over the top of his newspaper at the prisoner. “Look at the state of him, the filthy layabout! Look at his hair!”

He shot a nasty look sideways at Harry, whose untidy hair had always been a source of great annoyance to Uncle Vernon. Compared to the man on the television, however, whose gaunt face was surrounded by a matted, elbow-length tangle, Harry felt very well groomed indeed.

The reporter had reappeared.

“The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries will announce today
—”

“Hang on!” barked Uncle Vernon, staring furiously at the reporter. “You didn’t tell us where that maniac’s escaped from! What use is that? Lunatic could be coming up the street right now!”

Aunt Petunia, who was bony and horse-faced, whipped around and peered intently out of the kitchen window. Harry knew Aunt Petunia would simply love to be the one to call the hot line number. She was the nosiest woman in the world and spent most of her life spying on the boring, law-abiding neighbors.

“When will they *learn*,” said Uncle Vernon, pounding the table

with his large purple fist, “that hanging’s the only way to deal with these people?”

“Very true,” said Aunt Petunia, who was still squinting into next door’s runner beans.

Uncle Vernon drained his teacup, glanced at his watch, and added, “I’d better be off in a minute, Petunia. Marge’s train gets in at ten.”

Harry, whose thoughts had been upstairs with the Broomstick Servicing Kit, was brought back to earth with an unpleasant bump.

“Aunt Marge?” he blurted out. “Sh — *she’s* not coming here, is she?”

Aunt Marge was Uncle Vernon’s sister. Even though she was not a blood relative of Harry’s (whose mother had been Aunt Petunia’s sister), he had been forced to call her “Aunt” all his life. Aunt Marge lived in the country, in a house with a large garden, where she bred bulldogs. She didn’t often stay at Privet Drive, because she couldn’t bear to leave her precious dogs, but each of her visits stood out horribly vividly in Harry’s mind.

At Dudley’s fifth birthday party, Aunt Marge had whacked Harry around the shins with her walking stick to stop him from beating Dudley at musical statues. A few years later, she had turned up at Christmas with a computerized robot for Dudley and a box of dog biscuits for Harry. On her last visit, the year before Harry started at Hogwarts, Harry had accidentally trodden on the tail of her favorite dog. Ripper had chased Harry out into the garden and up a tree, and Aunt Marge had refused to call him off until past midnight. The memory of this incident still brought tears of laughter to Dudley’s eyes.

“Marge’ll be here for a week,” Uncle Vernon snarled, “and while we’re on the subject” — he pointed a fat finger threateningly at Harry — “we need to get a few things straight before I go and collect her.”

Dudley smirked and withdrew his gaze from the television. Watching Harry being bullied by Uncle Vernon was Dudley’s favorite form of entertainment.

“Firstly,” growled Uncle Vernon, “you’ll keep a civil tongue in your head when you’re talking to Marge.”

“All right,” said Harry bitterly, “if she does when she’s talking to me.”

“Secondly,” said Uncle Vernon, acting as though he had not heard Harry’s reply, “as Marge doesn’t know anything about your *abnormality*, I don’t want any — any *funny* stuff while she’s here. You behave yourself, got me?”

“I will if she does,” said Harry through gritted teeth.

“And thirdly,” said Uncle Vernon, his mean little eyes now slits in his great purple face, “we’ve told Marge you attend St. Brutus’s Secure Center for Incurably Criminal Boys.”

“*What?*” Harry yelled.

“And you’ll be sticking to that story, boy, or there’ll be trouble,” spat Uncle Vernon.

Harry sat there, white-faced and furious, staring at Uncle Vernon, hardly able to believe it. Aunt Marge coming for a week-long visit — it was the worst birthday present the Dursleys had ever given him, including that pair of Uncle Vernon’s old socks.

“Well, Petunia,” said Uncle Vernon, getting heavily to his feet, “I’ll be off to the station, then. Want to come along for the ride, Dudders?”

“No,” said Dudley, whose attention had returned to the television now that Uncle Vernon had finished threatening Harry.

“Duddy’s got to make himself smart for his auntie,” said Aunt Petunia, smoothing Dudley’s thick blond hair. “Mummy’s bought him a lovely new bow tie.”

Uncle Vernon clapped Dudley on his porky shoulder.

“See you in a bit, then,” he said, and he left the kitchen.

Harry, who had been sitting in a kind of horrified trance, had a sudden idea. Abandoning his toast, he got quickly to his feet and followed Uncle Vernon to the front door.

Uncle Vernon was pulling on his car coat.

“I’m not taking *you*,” he snarled as he turned to see Harry watching him.

“Like I wanted to come,” said Harry coldly. “I want to ask you something.”

Uncle Vernon eyed him suspiciously.

“Third years at Hog — at my school are allowed to visit the village sometimes,” said Harry.

“So?” snapped Uncle Vernon, taking his car keys from a hook next to the door.

“I need you to sign the permission form,” said Harry in a rush.

“And why should I do that?” sneered Uncle Vernon.

“Well,” said Harry, choosing his words carefully, “it’ll be hard work, pretending to Aunt Marge I go to that St. Whatsits —”

“St. Brutus’s Secure Center for Incurably Criminal Boys!” bellowed Uncle Vernon, and Harry was pleased to hear a definite

note of panic in Uncle Vernon's voice.

"Exactly," said Harry, looking calmly up into Uncle Vernon's large, purple face. "It's a lot to remember. I'll have to make it sound convincing, won't I? What if I accidentally let something slip?"

"You'll get the stuffing knocked out of you, won't you?" roared Uncle Vernon, advancing on Harry with his fist raised. But Harry stood his ground.

"Knocking the stuffing out of me won't make Aunt Marge forget what I could tell her," he said grimly.

Uncle Vernon stopped, his fist still raised, his face an ugly puce.

"But if you sign my permission form," Harry went on quickly, "I swear I'll remember where I'm supposed to go to school, and I'll act like a Mug — like I'm normal and everything."

Harry could tell that Uncle Vernon was thinking it over, even if his teeth were bared and a vein was throbbing in his temple.

"Right," he snapped finally. "I shall monitor your behavior carefully during Marge's visit. If, at the end of it, you've toed the line and kept to the story, I'll sign your ruddy form."

He wheeled around, pulled open the front door, and slammed it so hard that one of the little panes of glass at the top fell out.

Harry didn't return to the kitchen. He went back upstairs to his bedroom. If he was going to act like a real Muggle, he'd better start now. Slowly and sadly he gathered up all his presents and his birthday cards and hid them under the loose floorboard with his homework. Then he went to Hedwig's cage. Errol seemed to have recovered; he and Hedwig were both asleep, heads under their wings. Harry sighed, then poked them both awake.

“Hedwig,” he said gloomily, “you’re going to have to clear off for a week. Go with Errol. Ron’ll look after you. I’ll write him a note, explaining. And don’t look at me like that” — Hedwig’s large amber eyes were reproachful — “it’s not my fault. It’s the only way I’ll be allowed to visit Hogsmeade with Ron and Hermione.”

Ten minutes later, Errol and Hedwig (who had a note to Ron bound to her leg) soared out of the window and out of sight. Harry, now feeling thoroughly miserable, put the empty cage away inside the wardrobe.

But Harry didn’t have long to brood. In next to no time, Aunt Petunia was shrieking up the stairs for Harry to come down and get ready to welcome their guest.

“Do something about your hair!” Aunt Petunia snapped as he reached the hall.

Harry couldn’t see the point of trying to make his hair lie flat. Aunt Marge loved criticizing him, so the untidier he looked, the happier she would be.

All too soon, there was a crunch of gravel outside as Uncle Vernon’s car pulled back into the driveway, then the clunk of the car doors and footsteps on the garden path.

“Get the door!” Aunt Petunia hissed at Harry.

A feeling of great gloom in his stomach, Harry pulled the door open.

On the threshold stood Aunt Marge. She was very like Uncle Vernon: Large, beefy, and purple-faced, she even had a mustache, though not as bushy as his. In one hand she held an enormous suitcase, and tucked under the other was an old and evil-tempered

bulldog.

“Where’s my Dudders?” roared Aunt Marge. “Where’s my neffy-poo?”

Dudley came waddling down the hall, his blond hair plastered flat to his fat head, a bow tie just visible under his many chins. Aunt Marge thrust the suitcase into Harry’s stomach, knocking the wind out of him, seized Dudley in a tight one-armed hug, and planted a large kiss on his cheek.

Harry knew perfectly well that Dudley only put up with Aunt Marge’s hugs because he was well paid for it, and sure enough, when they broke apart, Dudley had a crisp twenty-pound note clutched in his fat fist.

“Petunia!” shouted Aunt Marge, striding past Harry as though he was a hat stand. Aunt Marge and Aunt Petunia kissed, or rather, Aunt Marge bumped her large jaw against Aunt Petunia’s bony cheekbone.

Uncle Vernon now came in, smiling jovially as he shut the door.

“Tea, Marge?” he said. “And what will Ripper take?”

“Ripper can have some tea out of my saucer,” said Aunt Marge as they all trooped into the kitchen, leaving Harry alone in the hall with the suitcase. But Harry wasn’t complaining; any excuse not to be with Aunt Marge was fine by him, so he began to heave the case upstairs into the spare bedroom, taking as long as he could.

By the time he got back to the kitchen, Aunt Marge had been supplied with tea and fruitcake, and Ripper was lapping noisily in the corner. Harry saw Aunt Petunia wince slightly as specks of tea and drool flecked her clean floor. Aunt Petunia hated animals.

“Who’s looking after the other dogs, Marge?” Uncle Vernon asked.

“Oh, I’ve got Colonel Fubster managing them,” boomed Aunt Marge. “He’s retired now, good for him to have something to do. But I couldn’t leave poor old Ripper. He pines if he’s away from me.”

Ripper began to growl again as Harry sat down. This directed Aunt Marge’s attention to Harry for the first time.

“So!” she barked. “Still here, are you?”

“Yes,” said Harry.

“Don’t you say ‘yes’ in that ungrateful tone,” Aunt Marge growled. “It’s damn good of Vernon and Petunia to keep you. Wouldn’t have done it myself. You’d have gone straight to an orphanage if you’d been dumped on *my* doorstep.”

Harry was bursting to say that he’d rather live in an orphanage than with the Dursleys, but the thought of the Hogsmeade form stopped him. He forced his face into a painful smile.

“Don’t you smirk at me!” boomed Aunt Marge. “I can see you haven’t improved since I last saw you. I hoped school would knock some manners into you.” She took a large gulp of tea, wiped her mustache, and said, “Where is it that you send him, again, Vernon?”

“St. Brutus’s,” said Uncle Vernon promptly. “It’s a first-rate institution for hopeless cases.”

“I see,” said Aunt Marge. “Do they use the cane at St. Brutus’s, boy?” she barked across the table.

“Er —”

Uncle Vernon nodded curtly behind Aunt Marge’s back.

“Yes,” said Harry. Then, feeling he might as well do the thing properly, he added, “All the time.”

“Excellent,” said Aunt Marge. “I won’t have this namby-pamby,

wishy-washy nonsense about not hitting people who deserve it. A good thrashing is what's needed in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred. Have *you* been beaten often?"

"Oh, yeah," said Harry, "loads of times."

Aunt Marge narrowed her eyes.

"I still don't like your tone, boy," she said. "If you can speak of your beatings in that casual way, they clearly aren't hitting you hard enough. Petunia, I'd write if I were you. Make it clear that you approve the use of extreme force in this boy's case."

Perhaps Uncle Vernon was worried that Harry might forget their bargain; in any case, he changed the subject abruptly.

"Heard the news this morning, Marge? What about that escaped prisoner, eh?"

As Aunt Marge started to make herself at home, Harry caught himself thinking almost longingly of life at number four without her. Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia usually encouraged Harry to stay out of their way, which Harry was only too happy to do. Aunt Marge, on the other hand, wanted Harry under her eye at all times, so that she could boom out suggestions for his improvement. She delighted in comparing Harry with Dudley, and took huge pleasure in buying Dudley expensive presents while glaring at Harry, as though daring him to ask why he hadn't got a present too. She also kept throwing out dark hints about what made Harry such an unsatisfactory person.

"You mustn't blame yourself for the way the boy's turned out, Vernon," she said over lunch on the third day. "If there's something rotten on the *inside*, there's nothing anyone can do about it."

Harry tried to concentrate on his food, but his hands shook and his face was starting to burn with anger. *Remember the form*, he told himself. *Think about Hogsmeade. Don't say anything. Don't rise* —

Aunt Marge reached for her glass of wine.

“It’s one of the basic rules of breeding,” she said. “You see it all the time with dogs. If there’s something wrong with the bitch, there’ll be something wrong with the pup —”

At that moment, the wineglass Aunt Marge was holding exploded in her hand. Shards of glass flew in every direction and Aunt Marge sputtered and blinked, her great ruddy face dripping.

“Marge!” squealed Aunt Petunia. “Marge, are you all right?”

“Not to worry,” grunted Aunt Marge, mopping her face with her napkin. “Must have squeezed it too hard. Did the same thing at Colonel Fubster’s the other day. No need to fuss, Petunia, I have a very firm grip . . .”

But Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon were both looking at Harry suspiciously, so he decided he’d better skip dessert and escape from the table as soon as he could.

Outside in the hall, he leaned against the wall, breathing deeply. It had been a long time since he’d lost control and made something explode. He couldn’t afford to let it happen again. The Hogsmeade form wasn’t the only thing at stake — if he carried on like that, he’d be in trouble with the Ministry of Magic.

Harry was still an underage wizard, and he was forbidden by wizard law to do magic outside school. His record wasn’t exactly clean either. Only last summer he’d gotten an official warning that had stated quite clearly that if the Ministry got wind of any more

magic in Privet Drive, Harry would face expulsion from Hogwarts.

He heard the Dursleys leaving the table and hurried upstairs out of the way.

Harry got through the next three days by forcing himself to think about his *Handbook of Do-It-Yourself Broomcare* whenever Aunt Marge started on him. This worked quite well, though it seemed to give him a glazed look, because Aunt Marge started voicing the opinion that he was mentally subnormal.

At last, at long last, the final evening of Marge's stay arrived. Aunt Petunia cooked a fancy dinner and Uncle Vernon uncorked several bottles of wine. They got all the way through the soup and the salmon without a single mention of Harry's faults; during the lemon meringue pie, Uncle Vernon bored them all with a long talk about Grunnings, his drill-making company; then Aunt Petunia made coffee and Uncle Vernon brought out a bottle of brandy.

"Can I tempt you, Marge?"

Aunt Marge had already had quite a lot of wine. Her huge face was very red.

"Just a small one, then," she chuckled. "A bit more than that . . . and a bit more . . . that's the ticket."

Dudley was eating his fourth slice of pie. Aunt Petunia was sipping coffee with her little finger sticking out. Harry really wanted to disappear into his bedroom, but he met Uncle Vernon's angry little eyes and knew he would have to sit it out.

"Aah," said Aunt Marge, smacking her lips and putting the empty brandy glass back down. "Excellent nosh, Petunia. It's normally just

a fry-up for me of an evening, with twelve dogs to look after. . . .” She burped richly and patted her great tweed stomach. “Pardon me. But I do like to see a healthy-sized boy,” she went on, winking at Dudley. “You’ll be a proper-sized man, Dudders, like your father. Yes, I’ll have a spot more brandy, Vernon. . . .

“Now, this one here —”

She jerked her head at Harry, who felt his stomach clench. *The Handbook*, he thought quickly.

“This one’s got a mean, runty look about him. You get that with dogs. I had Colonel Fubster drown one last year. Ratty little thing it was. Weak. Underbred.”

Harry was trying to remember page twelve of his book: *A Charm to Cure Reluctant Reversers*.

“It all comes down to blood, as I was saying the other day. Bad blood will out. Now, I’m saying nothing against your family, Petunia” — she patted Aunt Petunia’s bony hand with her shovel-like one — “but your sister was a bad egg. They turn up in the best families. Then she ran off with a wastrel and here’s the result right in front of us.”

Harry was staring at his plate, a funny ringing in his ears. *Grasp your broom firmly by the tail*, he thought. But he couldn’t remember what came next. Aunt Marge’s voice seemed to be boring into him like one of Uncle Vernon’s drills.

“This Potter,” said Aunt Marge loudly, seizing the brandy bottle and splashing more into her glass and over the tablecloth, “you never told me what he did?”

Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia were looking extremely tense.

Dudley had even looked up from his pie to gape at his parents.

“He — didn’t work,” said Uncle Vernon, with half a glance at Harry. “Unemployed.”

“As I expected!” said Aunt Marge, taking a huge swig of brandy and wiping her chin on her sleeve. “A no-account, good-for-nothing, lazy scrounger who —”

“He was not,” said Harry suddenly. The table went very quiet. Harry was shaking all over. He had never felt so angry in his life.

“MORE BRANDY!” yelled Uncle Vernon, who had gone very white. He emptied the bottle into Aunt Marge’s glass. “You, boy,” he snarled at Harry. “Go to bed, go on —”

“No, Vernon,” hiccuped Aunt Marge, holding up a hand, her tiny bloodshot eyes fixed on Harry’s. “Go on, boy, go on. Proud of your parents, are you? They go and get themselves killed in a car crash (drunk, I expect) —”

“They didn’t die in a car crash!” said Harry, who found himself on his feet.

“They died in a car crash, you nasty little liar, and left you to be a burden on their decent, hardworking relatives!” screamed Aunt Marge, swelling with fury. “You are an insolent, ungrateful little —”

But Aunt Marge suddenly stopped speaking. For a moment, it looked as though words had failed her. She seemed to be swelling with inexpressible anger — but the swelling didn’t stop. Her great red face started to expand, her tiny eyes bulged, and her mouth stretched too tightly for speech — next second, several buttons had just burst from her tweed jacket and pinged off the walls — she was inflating like a monstrous balloon, her stomach bursting free of her

tweed waistband, each of her fingers blowing up like a salami —

“MARGE!” yelled Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia together as Aunt Marge’s whole body began to rise off her chair toward the ceiling. She was entirely round, now, like a vast life buoy with piggy eyes, and her hands and feet stuck out weirdly as she drifted up into the air, making apoplectic popping noises. Ripper came skidding into the room, barking madly.

“NOOOOOOOO!”

Uncle Vernon seized one of Marge’s feet and tried to pull her down again, but was almost lifted from the floor himself. A second later, Ripper leapt forward and sank his teeth into Uncle Vernon’s leg.

Harry tore from the dining room before anyone could stop him, heading for the cupboard under the stairs. The cupboard door burst magically open as he reached it. In seconds, he had heaved his trunk to the front door. He sprinted upstairs and threw himself under the bed, wrenching up the loose floorboard, and grabbed the pillowcase full of his books and birthday presents. He wriggled out, seized Hedwig’s empty cage, and dashed back downstairs to his trunk, just as Uncle Vernon burst out of the dining room, his trouser leg in bloody tatters.

“COME BACK IN HERE!” he bellowed. “COME BACK AND PUT HER RIGHT!”

But a reckless rage had come over Harry. He kicked his trunk open, pulled out his wand, and pointed it at Uncle Vernon.

“She deserved it,” Harry said, breathing very fast. “She deserved what she got. You keep away from me.”

He fumbled behind him for the latch on the door.

“I’m going,” Harry said, “I’ve had enough.”

And in the next moment, he was out in the dark, quiet street, heaving his heavy trunk behind him, Hedwig’s cage under his arm.

Tant Marge se Groot Glips

Toe Harry die volgende oggend afgaan vir ontbyt, sit die drie Dursleys reeds om die kombuistafel. Hulle kyk na 'n splinternuwe televisie, 'n welkom-tuis-geskenk vir Dudley wat luidkeels gekla het oor die stywe ent se stap van die yskas na die televisie in die woonkamer. Dudley bring nou die grootste deel van die somer in die kombuis deur met sy klein varkogies vasgenaël op die skerm en sy vyf kenne wat skud soos hy die hele tyd lank eet.

Harry gaan sit tussen Dudley en oom Vernon, 'n groot frisgeboorde man met 'n kort nek en 'n yslike snor. Nie een van die Dursleys gee 'n teken dat hulle merk dat Harry die vertrek binnegekom het nie, wat nog te sê hom gelukwens, maar Harry is gewoon d hieaan en dit raak hom nie meer nie. Hy neem 'n stuk roosterbrood en kyk na die nuusleser op die televisie wat halfpad deur 'n berig oor 'n ontsnapte gevangene is.

“... die publiek word gewaarsku dat Swardt gewapen en uiters gevaarlik is. 'n Spesiale blitslyn is ingestel en indien enigiemand hom sien, moet hulle dit onmiddellik aanmeld.”

“Onnodig om vir ons te vertel dat daar niks goeds in hom steek nie,” snork oom Vernon en gluur oor sy koerant na die gevangene op die skerm. “Kyk hoe lyk hy, die vieslike leegleër! Kyk sy hare!”

Hy loer skrams na Harry, wie se slordige hare nog altyd vir hom 'n doring in die vlees was. In teenstelling met die man op die televisie, wie se vervalte gesig omring is deur 'n gekoekte bos hare wat tot op sy elmboë hang, voel Harry egter besonder goed versorg.

Die nuusleser verskyn weer.

“Die Ministerie vir Landbou en Visserye sal vandag aankondig —”

“Wag 'n bietjie!” blaas oom Vernon terwyl hy ergerlik na die nuusleser kyk. “Jy't nie vir ons gesê van waar daardie maniak ontsnap het nie! Wat help dit miskien? Vir al wat ons weet, is die ou malle hier onder in die straat!”

Tant Petunia, benerig en met 'n perdegestig, wip om en staar intens deur die kombuisvenster. Harry weet tant Petunia sal vreeslik baie daarvan hou om die een te wees wat die blitslyn bel. Sy is die nuuskierigste

vroon in die wêreld en is gedurig besig om op haar vervelinge, wetsgehoorsame bure te spioeneer.

"Wanneer sal hulle leer," sê oom Vernon en hamer op die tafel met sy groot, pers vuur, "dat die galgtou die enigste manier is om met hierdie mense te werk?"

"Baie waar," sê tant Petunia, wat nog steeds skeelweg deur die bure se rinkelende probeer kyk.

Oom Vernon drink sy tee klaar, loer na sy horlosie en voeg by, "Ek moet weg wees, Petunia, Marge se trein kom tienuur aan."

Harry se gedagtes was bo in sy kamer by die Besemstok Versienstel, en hy kom met 'n onaangename skok terug aarde toe.

"Tant Marge?" blaker hy uit. "S-sy kom nie hierheen nie, kom sy?"

Tant Marge is oom Vernon se suster. Hoewel sy nie bloedfamilie van Harry is nie (Harry se ma was tant Petunia se suster), is hy gedwing om vir haar "tante" te sê. Tant Marge woon op die platteland in 'n huis met 'n groot tuin, en sy teel bulhonde. Sy kom nie gereeld by Ligusterlaan kuier nie, want sy kan dit nie verdra om haar dierbare honde alleen te laat nie, maar elkeen van haar besoeke staan aaklig helder afgeteken in Harry se geheue.

Op Dudley se vyfde verjaardagparty het tant Marge vir Harry met haar klerie op sy skene geslaan om te keer dat hy Dudley met 'n musiekspeletjie klop. 'n Paar jaar later het sy een Kersdag opgedaag met 'n gerekenariseerde robot vir Dudley en 'n doos vol hondebeskuitjies vir Harry. Met haar laaste besoek, die jaar voor Harry Hogwarts toe is, het Harry per ongeluk op haar liefliingshond se poot getrap. Ripper het Harry tot bo in 'n boom in die tuin gejaag, en tant Marge het tot na middernag geweier om hom terug te roep. Die herinnering hieraan laat Dudley se oë nog steeds traan van die lag.

"Marge gaan vir 'n week lank hier wees," snou oom Vernon, "en terwyl ek daaraan dink," en hy hou 'n vet vinger dreigend voor Harry, "daar is 'n paar dinge wat ons moet uitstryk voor ek haar gaan haal."

Dudley grynsag en kyk vir 'n oomblik weg van die televisiestel. Om te sien hoe oom Vernon vir Harry boelie, is Dudley se gunsteling-tydverdryf.

"Eerstens," grom oom Vernon, "sorg jy dat jy ordentlik met Marge praat."

"Goed," sê Harry bitter, "as sy dieselfde doen wanneer sy met my praat."

"Tweedens," sê oom Vernon, en hy maak asof hy Harry se antwoord glad nie gehoor het nie, "siende dat Marge niks van jou afwyking weet nie, wil ek niks – maar niks snaaks sien gebeur terwyl sy hier is nie. Jy gedra jou, verstaan?"

"Ek sal as sy sal," sê Harry deur sy geknerste tande.

"En derdens," sê oom Vernon en sy gemene klein ogies is nou skrefies

in sy groot pers gesig, "ons het vir Marge gesê dat jy die Sint Brutus Veiligheidsentrum vir Ongeneeslik Kriminele Seuns bywoon."

"Wat?" gil Harry.

"En jy hou by daardie storie, hoor jy, of daar is moeilikheid," spoeg oom Vernon dit uit.

Harry gluur na oom Vernon; hy is wit in die gesig en woedend; hy kan dit skaars glo. Tant Marge kom vir 'n week kuier – dit is die slegste verjaardagpresent wat die Dursleys nog ooit vir hom gegee het, en dit sluit daardie ou paar sokkies van oom Vernon in.

"Wel, Petunia," sê oom Vernon terwyl hy swaar orent kom, "dan gaan ek maar stasie toe. Wil jy saamry, Dudley?"

"Nee," sê Dudley, wie se aandag reeds weer terug is by die televisieprogram noudat oom Vernon klaar vir Harry gedreig het.

"Duddie moet homself netjies maak vir sy tannie," sê tant Petunia en sy stryk Dudley se dik blonde hare plat. "Mammie het vir hom 'n pragtige nuwe strikdas gekoop."

Oom Vernon klap Dudley op sy vet skouer.

"Sien julle nou-nou," sê hy toe hy by die kombuis uitstap.

Harry, wat in 'n aaklige soort beswyming verval het, kry skielik 'n plan. Hy los sy roosterbrood, kom vinnig orent en volg oom Vernon na die voordeur.

Oom Vernon is besig om sy jas aan te trek.

"Jy kom nie saam nie," sê hy toe hy omdraai en sien dat Harry na hom staan en kyk.

"Asof ek nogal wil saamgaan," sê Harry koud. "Ek wil iets vra."

Oom Vernon gluur hom agterdogtig aan.

"Derdejaars by Hog – by my skool kan soms dorp toe gaan," sê Harry.

"En?" snou oom Vernon terwyl hy sy motorsleutels van 'n haak langs die deur afhaal.

"Die toestemmingsvorm moet geteken word," sê Harry vinnig.

"En hoekom sal ek dit nogal doen?" sê oom Vernon smalend.

"Wel," sê Harry en hy kies sy woorde versigtig, "dit gaan baie moeilik wees om voor tant Marge te maak asof ek na daardie Sint Watse . . ."

"Sint Brutus Veiligheidsentrum vir Ongeneeslik Kriminele Seuns!" bulder oom Vernon, en Harry kry lekker toe hy hoor hoe benoud oom Vernon klink.

"Presies," sê Harry en kyk bedaard op in oom Vernon se groot, pers gesig. "Dit sal moeilik gaan om dit te onthou. En dit moet oortuigend klink, of hoe? Wat as ek heel per ongeluk iets uitlap?"

"Jy sal pimpel en pers geslaan word, dis wat!" brul oom Vernon terwyl hy vuus in die lug op Harry afstorm, maar Harry staan sy man.

"Om my pimpel en pers te slaan, sal tant Marge nie laat vergeet wat ek vir haar kon gesê het nie," sê hy grimmig.

Oom Vernon steek vas, sy vuig nog steeds in die lug en sy gesig 'n nare persbruin kleur.

“Maar as die toestemmingsvorm geteken is,” gaan Harry vinnig voort, “dan sweer ek dat ek sal onthou na watter skool ek kamma gaan, en ek sal net soos 'n Mog- ek sal maak of ek normaal is en alles.”

Harry kan sien dat oom Vernon hieroor nadink, ten spyte van sy ontblote tande en die aartjies wat in sy slape klop.

“Goed,” gee hy uiteindelik toe. “Ek sal jou gedrag tydens Marge se besoek fyn dophou. Indien ek aan die einde van die besoek voel dat jy jou kant gebring en by die storie gehou het, sal ek daardie verbrande vorm teken.”

Hy swaai om, trek die voordeur oop en slaan dit so hard toe dat een van die glasruitjies aan die bokant uitval.

Harry gaan nie terug kombuis toe nie. Hy loop met die trappe op na sy kamer toe. As hy soos 'n egte Moggel moet optree, dan moet hy seker nou begin. Hy tel al sy presente en verjaardagkaarte stadig met 'n swaar hart op, en steek hulle saam met sy huiswerk onder die los vloerplank in. Toe gaan hy na Hedwig se kou. Dit lyk of Errol beter is, hy en Hedwig is vas aan die slaap met hul koppe onder hul vlerke. Harry sug en maak hulle wakker.

“Hedwig,” sê hy swaarmoedig, “jy sal moet weggaan vir 'n week. Saam met Errol, Ron sal na jou kyk. Ek sal vir hom 'n briefie skryf en verduidelik wat aangaan. En moenie so na my kyk nie –” Hedwig se groot ambergeel oë is verwyttend, “dis nie my skuld nie. Dis al manier hoe ek toegelaat sal word om saam met Ron en Hermien Hogsmeade toe te gaan.”

Tien minute later seil Errol en Hedwig (met 'n nota vir Ron aan haar been) deur die venster, en verdwyn uit sig. Harry voel behoorlik misnoostig toe hy die leë kou in sy klerekas bêre.

Harry hoef egter nie lank te tob nie, want net toe skree tant Petunia onder die trappe dat Harry moet afkom en regmaak om hul gas te verwelkom.

“Doen iets aan jou hare!” snou tant Petunia toe hy in die voorportaal kom.

Dit maak vir Harry geen sin om sy hare te probeer platkam nie. Dis vir tant Marge tog te lekker om hom te kritiseer, hoe slordiger hy lyk, hoe gelukkiger is sy.

Alte gou hoor hy die geknars van gruis soos oom Vernon die motor op die rypad parkeer, en toe die gedoef van motordeure, en voetstappe op die tuinpaadjie.

“Maak oop die deur!” sis tant Petunia vir Harry.

Met 'n nare gevoel op sy maag maak Harry die deur oop.

Tant Marge staan op die drumpel. Sy lyk baie soos oom Vernon; groot, iris en pers in die gesig, sy het tot 'n snor, hoewel nie heeltemal so ruig

soos syne nie. Sy hou 'n tamaai reistas in een hand vas, en onder die ander arm dra sy 'n knorrige ou bulhond.

“Waar's die kleine Dudley?” brul tant Marge. “Waar's my nefiepop?”

Dudley kom die portaal binnegewaggel, sy blonde hare is vasgepleister teen sy vet kop en 'n strikdas is net-net sigbaar onder sy spul kenne. Tant Marge druk die tas in Harry se maag sodat hy skoon winduit is, gryp vir Dudley in 'n stywe eenarmomhelsing en plant 'n groot soen op sy wang.

Harry weet baie goed dat Dudley tant Marge se gedruk net duld omdat hy goed daarvoor beloon word, en dit is ook so, want toe hulle wegstaan, hou Dudley 'n kraaknuwe twintigrandnoot in sy vet vuus vas.

“Petunia!” skree tant Marge en stap verby Harry asof hy 'n hoederak is. Tant Marge en tant Petunia soen mekaar, of liewer, tant Marge stamp haar yslike kakebeen teen tant Petunia se wangbeen.

Oom Vernon kom binne en glimlag opgeruimd toe hy die deur toestoot.

“Tee, Marge?” sê hy. “En wat van Ripper?”

“Ripper kan 'n bietjie tee uit my piering drink,” sê tant Marge terwyl hulle almal kombuis toe stap en vir Harry alleen met die tas in die voorportaal los. Harry kla nie; enige kans om nie by tant Marge te wees nie, is so reg in sy kraal, dus begin hy die tas so stadig as wat hy kan met die trappe opdra gastekamer toe.

Teen die tyd dat hy terug is in die kombuis, het tant Marge al haar tee en vrugtekoek en is Ripper besig om raserig in die hoek te staan en slurp. Harry sien hoe tant Petunia effens inmekaarkrimp elke keer dat druppels tee en spoeg vlekke op haar skoon vloer maak. Tant Petunia haat diere.

“Wie kyk na die ander honde, Marge?” vra oom Vernon.

“O, kolonel Verster sorg vir hulle,” daver tant Marge. “Hy's afgetree en dis goed vir hom om iets te hê om te doen. Ek kon die arme Ripper egter nie daar los nie. Hy kwyn weg sonder my.”

Ripper begin grom toe Harry gaan sit. Dit vestig tant Marge se aandag vir die eerste keer op Harry.

“So!” blaf sy. “Nog steeds hier?”

“Ja,” sê Harry.

“Moenie 'ja' in daardie ondankbare stemtoon sê nie,” grom tant Marge. “Dis verbrands goed van Vernon en Petunia om jou groot te maak. Ek sou dit nie gedoen het nie. Jy sou reguit weeshuis toe gegaan het as jy op my drumpel gelos is.”

Harry brand om te sê dat hy eerder in 'n weeshuis sal woon as by die Dursleys, maar die gedagte aan Hogsmeade keer hom. Hy dwing sy gesig in 'n pynlike glimlag.

“Moenie vir my gesigte trek nie!” daver tant Marge. “Ek kan sien dat jy nog niks verbeter het sedert ek jou laas gesien het nie. Ek het gehoop

die skool sal 'n bietjie mamere in jou inhamer." Sy vat 'n groot sluk tee, ver haar snor af en sê, "Waarheen stuur julle hom nou weer, Vernon?"

"Sint Brutus," sê oom Vernon dadelik. "Dis 'n eersteklas inrigting vir hopelose gevalle."

"Ek sien," sê tant Marge. "Gebruik hulle die rottang by Sint Brutus, sy?" blaf sy oor die tafel.

"Ja."

Oom Vernon knik kortaf agter tant Marge se rug.

"Ja," sê Harry, en omdat hy voel dat hy dit net sowel ordentlik kan doen, voeg hy by, "die hele tyd."

"Uitstekend," sê tant Marge. "Ek kan hierdie soetsappige, afgewaterde twak dat mense nie geslaan mag word al verdien hulle dit, glad nie verdra nie. 'n Goeie pak slae is wat nodig is in nege-en-negentig uit elke honderd gevalle. Kry jy dikwels pak?"

"O, ja," sê Harry. "Die hele tyd."

Tant Marge se oë vernou.

"Ek hou nog steeds nie van jou stemtoon nie, seun," sê sy. "As jy so ligtelik oor jou loesings kan praat, dan slaan hulle jou vir seker nie hard genoeg nie. Petunia, ek sal skryf as ek jy is. Laat hulle duidelik verstaan dat jy uiterste geweld goedkeur in hierdie seun se geval."

Dalk was oom Vernon bang dat Harry hul ooreenkoms sal vergeet, want hy verander die onderwerp vinnig.

"Het jy vanoggend se nuus gehoor, Marge? Wat sê jy van daardie ontwaapte gevangene?"

Hoe meer tant Marge haarself tuis maak, hoe meer betrap Harry homself dat hy amper verlangend terugdink aan die lewe by nommer vier sonder haar. Oom Vernon en tant Petunia moedig Harry gewoonlik aan om uit hul pad te bly, iets wat Harry alte graag doen. Tant Marge wil Harry egter die hele tyd in die oog hou sodat sy voorstelle vir sy verbetering kan uitbasuin. Sy geniet dit om Harry met Dudley te vergelyk en put groot behae daaruit om vir Dudley duur presente te koop terwyl sy na Harry gluur, nes of sy hom uitdaag om te vra hoekom hy dan nie presente kry nie. Sy gooi ook die hele tyd skimpe oor die redes hoekom Harry so 'n onmoontlike kind is.

"Julle moet juis nie blameer vir hoe die seun is nie, Vernon," sê sy tydens middagete op die derde dag. "As daar iets vrots aan die binnekant is, dan is daar niks wat 'n mens daaraan kan doen nie."

Harry probeer om op sy kos te konsentreer, maar sy hande bewe en sy gesig brand van woede. Onthou die vorm, sê hy vir homself. Dink aan Hogsmeade. Moet niks sê nie. Moenie reageer –

Tant Marge steek haar hand uit na haar wynglas.

"Dis een van die basiese reëls van 'n goeie telery," sê sy. "'n Mens sien

dit die hele tyd met honde. As daar fout is met die teef, dan is daar fout met die klein hondjie ook –”

Op daardie oomblik ontplof die glas wat tant Marge in haar hand hou. Splinters glas vlieg in alle rigtings en tant Marge proes en knip haar oë; haar groot rooi gesig is druipnat.

“Marge!” gil tant Petunia. “Marge, het jy seergekry?”

“Moet jou nie bekommer nie,” snork tant Marge terwyl sy haar gesig met haar servet afvee. “Het seker te hard vasgehou. Het dieselfde ding nou die dag by kolonel Verster oorgekom. Moenie ’n gedoente maak nie, Petunia, ek het ’n baie ferm greep . . .”

Tant Petunia en oom Vernon kyk albei agterdogtig na Harry, dus besluit hy om die poeding oor te slaan en so gou moontlik van die tafel af op te staan.

Buite in die portaal leun hy teen die muur en trek sy asem diep in. Hy het bitter lank laas beheer verloor en iets laat ontplof. Hy kan nie bekostig dat dit weer gebeur nie. Die Hogsmeade-vorm is nie al wat op die spel is nie – as hy so aangaan, is hy netnou in die moeilikheid by die Ministerie vir Towerkuns.

Harry is ’n minderjarige towenaar en mag kragtens towenaarswette nie buite die skool toor nie. Sy rekord is buitendien nie skoon nie. Net die vorige somer het hy ’n amptelike waarskuwing gekry waarin dit duidelik uitgespel is dat indien die Ministerie van verdere toordery in Ligusterlaan te hore kom, Harry uit Hogwarts geskors sal word.

Hy hoor hoe die Dursleys die tafel verlaat en maak homself vinnig uit die voete.

Harry slaag daarin om deur die volgende drie dae te kom deur homself te dwing om aan sy *Handboek van Doen-dit-self Besemsorg* te dink elke keer dat tant Marge met hom skoor soek. Dit werk nogal goed, maar dit moet seker ’n glasige uitdrukking aan sy gesig gee, want tant Marge begin sê dat sy vermoed dat hy verstandelik gestrem is.

Uiteindelik is dit die laaste aand van tant Marge se besoek. Tant Petunia het ’n heerlike ete gekook en oom Vernon maak etlike bottels wyn oop. Hulle kom deur die sop en die salm sonder om een keer oor Harry se tekortkomings te praat; tydens die suurlemoenskuimtert verveel oom Vernon almal met ’n lang relaas oor Kroepp, sy boormaatskappy; toe maak tant Petunia koffie en oom Vernon haal ’n bottel brandewyn uit.

“Wat van ’n glasier, Marge?”

Tant Marge het reeds heelwat wyn gedrink. Haar groot gesig is bloed-rooi.

“Net ’n ou kleintjie,” giggel sy. “’n Bietjie meer as dit . . . nog ’n bietjie . . . so ja.”

Dudley eet sy vierde stuk tert. Tant Petunia teug aan haar koffie met

haar pinkie in die lug. Harry wil baie graag na sy kamer gaan, maar hy vang oom Vernon se klein, kwaai ogies en besef dat hy moet bly waar hy is.

“Aha,” sê tant Marge en sy smak haar lippe toe sy die leë brandewyn-glas neersit. “Uitstekende kos, Petunia. Ek gooi saans gewoonlik net iets in die pan, want met twaalf honde om voor te sorg . . .” Sy breek ’n yslike wind en vryf haar groot maag. “Verskoon my, maar ek hou van ’n seun wat lekker fris is,” gaan sy voort, terwyl sy vir Dudley knipoog. “Jy sal ’n behoorlike groot man word, Dudley, nes jou pa. Ja, net nog so ’n lekseltjie brandewyn, Vernon . . .”

“Maar hierdie een —”

Sy ruk haar kop na Harry wat voel hoe sy maag saamtrek. Die *Handboek*, dink hy vinnig.

“Hierdie een lyk soos ’n gemene klein misgewassie. ’n Mens sien dit by honde. Ek het dat kolonel Verster verlede jaar een versuip. Beneukte klein gedrog. Swak. Ingeteel.”

Harry probeer bladsy twaalf van sy boek onthou: ’n *Towerspreuk om teensinnige Tru-bewegings te genees*.

“Dit kom alles op bloed neer, soos ek die ander dag gesê het. Swak bloedlyne wys. Dis nie dat ek iets teen jou familie het nie, Petunia” – sy tik-tik op tant Petunia se benerige hand met haar skopgraaf van ’n klou, “maar jou suster was ’n vrot eier. ’n Mens kry hulle in die beste families, en toe loop sy nog weg met daardie deurbringer en hier sit ons nou met die gevolg voor ons.”

Harry staar na sy bord; daar is ’n vreemde gesuis in sy ore. *Neem die besemstok ferm aan die stert*, dink hy, maar hy kan nie onthou wat volgende kom nie. Dis of tant Marge se stem soos een van oom Vernon se boorpunte deur hom sny.

“Hierdie Potter,” sê tant Marge hard toe sy die bottel gryp en nog brandewyn in haar glas en oor die tafeldoek skink, “julle het my nog nooit gesê wat hy gedoen het nie?”

Oom Vernon en tant Petunia lyk besonder gespanne. Dudley kyk selfs op van sy tert om na sy ouers te staar.

“Hy – het nie gewerk nie,” sê oom Vernon, terwyl hy vlugtig na Harry kyk. “Werkloos.”

“Nes ek gedink het!” sê tant Marge en sy vat ’n groot sluk brandewyn en vee haar ken aan haar mou af. “’n Vrotsige, nikswerd, lui jansalie wat —”

“Hy was nie,” sê Harry skielik. Die tafel word baie stil. Harry se hele liggaam bewe. In sy lewe was hy nog nooit so kwaad nie.

“NOG BRANDEWYN!” gil oom Vernon wat skielik doodsbлек geword het. Hy maak die bottel in tant Marge se glas leeg. “Jy,” grom hy vir Harry. “Gaan bed toe, komaan —”

“Nee, Vernon,” hik tant Marge en hou haar hand op, haar klein, bloed-

belope ogies vol op Harry gerig. "Gaan voort, jong, gaan voort. Trots op jou ouers, nê? Hulle't mos verongeluk (dronk, sou ek sê) –"

"Hulle is nie in 'n motorongeluk dood nie!" sê Harry wat nou regop staan.

"Hulle is dood in 'n motorongeluk, jou nare klein leuenaar, en het jou agtergelaat om 'n oorlas te wees vir hul ordentlike, hardwerkende familie!" skree tant Marge en sy swel van woede. "Jy is 'n astrante, ondankbare klein –"

Tant Marge hou meteens op met praat. Vir 'n oomblik lyk dit of sy nie 'n woord kan uitkry nie. Dit lyk of sy swel van onbeskryflike woede – maar die swellery hou nie op nie. Haar groot rooi gesig word nog groter, haar klein ogies peul uit en haar mond is te styf getrek om te kan praat. Die volgende oomblik spat etlike knope van haar tweedbaadjie af en pieng teen die mure – sy blaas soos 'n monsteragtige ballon op, haar maag bars uit haar tweedromp se lyfband, elke vinger is so dik soos 'n salami . . .

"MARGE!" gil oom Vernon en tant Petunia tesame, net toe tant Marge se hele liggaam opstyg uit haar stoel, reguit plafon toe. Sy is koeëlrond, soos 'n yslike reddingsboei met varkogies, en sy dryf die lug in met haar hande en voete wat op 'n eienaardige manier kante toe uitsteek, terwyl sy onwillekeurige plofgeluidjies maak. Ripper kom die vertrek gly-gly binne, en gaan verwoed aan die blaf.

"NEEEEEEE!"

Oom Vernon gryp een van tant Marge se voete en probeer haar grond toe trek, maar hy word amper self van die vloer af gelig. Die volgende oomblik spring Ripper vorentoe en slaan sy tande in oom Vernon se been in.

Harry maak dat hy uit die eetkamer wegkom voor iemand hom kan keer, en haas hom na die kas onder die trappe. Die kasdeur bars vanself oop toe hy daar kom. Hy sleep sy trommel in 'n oogwenk tot by die voordeur. Toe storm hy boontoe, duik onder sy bed in, ruk die los vloerplank op en gryp die kussingsloop vol boeke en verjaardagpresente. Hy wriemel weer uit, gryp Hedwig se leë kou en skarrel af met die trappe na sy trommel, net toe oom Vernon by die eetkamer uitbars, die pyp van sy lang broek die ene bloed en rafels.

"KOM TERUG!" bulk hy. "KOM TERUG EN MAAK HAAR REG!"

n Redelose woede het egter van Harry besit geneem. Hy skop die trommel oop, pluk sy towerstaf uit en rig dit op oom Vernon.

"Dis haar verdiende loon," sê Harry en sy asem jaag. "Sy verdien wat met haar gebeur het. Bly weg van my af."

Hy vroetel agter hom met die deur se knip.

"Ek loop nou," sê Harry. "Ek het genoeg gehad."

Die volgende oomblik is hy buite in die donker, stil straat met sy swaar trommel wat hy agter hom aansleep en Hedwig se kou onder sy arm.

CHAPTER THREE



THE KNIGHT BUS

Harry was several streets away before he collapsed onto a low wall in Magnolia Crescent, panting from the effort of dragging his trunk. He sat quite still, anger still surging through him, listening to the frantic thumping of his heart.

But after ten minutes alone in the dark street, a new emotion overtook him: panic. Whichever way he looked at it, he had never been in a worse fix. He was stranded, quite alone, in the dark Muggle world, with absolutely nowhere to go. And the worst of it was, he had just done serious magic, which meant that he was almost certainly expelled from Hogwarts. He had broken the Decree for the

Restriction of Underage Wizardry so badly, he was surprised Ministry of Magic representatives weren't swooping down on him where he sat.

Harry shivered and looked up and down Magnolia Crescent. What was going to happen to him? Would he be arrested, or would he simply be outlawed from the wizarding world? He thought of Ron and Hermione, and his heart sank even lower. Harry was sure that, criminal or not, Ron and Hermione would want to help him now, but they were both abroad, and with Hedwig gone, he had no means of contacting them.

He didn't have any Muggle money, either. There was a little wizard gold in the money bag at the bottom of his trunk, but the rest of the fortune his parents had left him was stored in a vault at Gringotts WIZARDING Bank in London. He'd never be able to drag his trunk all the way to London. Unless . . .

He looked down at his wand, which he was still clutching in his hand. If he was already expelled (his heart was now thumping painfully fast), a bit more magic couldn't hurt. He had the Invisibility Cloak he had inherited from his father — what if he bewitched the trunk to make it feather-light, tied it to his broomstick, covered himself in the cloak, and flew to London? Then he could get the rest of his money out of his vault and . . . begin his life as an outcast. It was a horrible prospect, but he couldn't sit on this wall forever, or he'd find himself trying to explain to Muggle police why he was out in the dead of night with a trunkful of spellbooks and a broomstick.

Harry opened his trunk again and pushed the contents aside, looking for the Invisibility Cloak — but before he had found it, he

straightened up suddenly, looking around him once more.

A funny prickling on the back of his neck had made Harry feel he was being watched, but the street appeared to be deserted, and no lights shone from any of the large square houses.

He bent over his trunk again, but almost immediately stood up once more, his hand clenched on his wand. He had sensed rather than heard it: Someone or something was standing in the narrow gap between the garage and the fence behind him. Harry squinted at the black alleyway. If only it would move, then he'd know whether it was just a stray cat or — something else.

“*Lumos*,” Harry muttered, and a light appeared at the end of his wand, almost dazzling him. He held it high over his head, and the pebble-dashed walls of number two suddenly sparkled; the garage door gleamed, and between them Harry saw, quite distinctly, the hulking outline of something very big, with wide, gleaming eyes.

Harry stepped backward. His legs hit his trunk and he tripped. His wand flew out of his hand as he flung out an arm to break his fall, and he landed, hard, in the gutter —

There was a deafening BANG, and Harry threw up his hands to shield his eyes against a sudden blinding light —

With a yell, he rolled back onto the pavement, just in time. A second later, a gigantic pair of wheels and headlights screeched to a halt exactly where Harry had just been lying. They belonged, as Harry saw when he raised his head, to a triple-decker, violently purple bus, which had appeared out of thin air. Gold lettering over the windshield spelled *The Knight Bus*.

For a split second, Harry wondered if he had been knocked silly.

by his fall. Then a conductor in a purple uniform leapt out of the bus and began to speak loudly to the night.

“Welcome to the Knight Bus, emergency transport for the stranded witch or wizard. Just stick out your wand hand, step on board, and we can take you anywhere you want to go. My name is Stan Shunpike, and I will be your conductor this eve —”

The conductor stopped abruptly. He had just caught sight of Harry, who was still sitting on the ground. Harry snatched up his wand again and scrambled to his feet. Close up, he saw that Stan Shunpike was only a few years older than he was, eighteen or nineteen at most, with large, protruding ears and quite a few pimples.

“What were you doin’ down there?” said Stan, dropping his professional manner.

“Fell over,” said Harry.

“‘Choo fall over for?” sniggered Stan.

“I didn’t do it on purpose,” said Harry, annoyed. One of the knees in his jeans was torn, and the hand he had thrown out to break his fall was bleeding. He suddenly remembered why he had fallen over and turned around quickly to stare at the alleyway between the garage and fence. The Knight Bus’s headlamps were flooding it with light, and it was empty.

“‘Choo lookin’ at?” said Stan.

“There was a big black thing,” said Harry, pointing uncertainly into the gap. “Like a dog . . . but massive . . .”

He looked around at Stan, whose mouth was slightly open. With a feeling of unease, Harry saw Stan’s eyes move to the scar on Harry’s forehead.

“Woss that on your ’ead?” said Stan abruptly.

“Nothing,” said Harry quickly, flattening his hair over his scar. If the Ministry of Magic was looking for him, he didn’t want to make it too easy for them.

“Woss your name?” Stan persisted.

“Neville Longbottom,” said Harry, saying the first name that came into his head. “So — so this bus,” he went on quickly, hoping to distract Stan, “did you say it goes *anywhere*?”

“Yep,” said Stan proudly, “anywhere you like, long’s it’s on land. Can’t do nuffink underwater. ’Ere,” he said, looking suspicious again, “you *did* flag us down, dincha? Stuck out your wand ’and, dincha?”

“Yes,” said Harry quickly. “Listen, how much would it be to get to London?”

“Eleven Sickles,” said Stan, “but for firteen you get ’ot chocolate, and for fifteen you get an ’ot water bottle an’ a toofbrush in the color of your choice.”

Harry rummaged once more in his trunk, extracted his money bag, and shoved some silver into Stan’s hand. He and Stan then lifted his trunk, with Hedwig’s cage balanced on top, up the steps of the bus.

There were no seats; instead, half a dozen brass bedsteads stood beside the curtained windows. Candles were burning in brackets beside each bed, illuminating the wood-paneled walls. A tiny wizard in a nightcap at the rear of the bus muttered, “Not now, thanks, I’m pickling some slugs” and rolled over in his sleep.

“You ’ave this one,” Stan whispered, shoving Harry’s trunk under the bed right behind the driver, who was sitting in an armchair in

front of the steering wheel. "This is our driver, Ernie Prang. This is Neville Longbottom, Ern."

Ernie Prang, an elderly wizard wearing very thick glasses, nodded to Harry, who nervously flattened his bangs again and sat down on his bed.

"Take 'er away, Ern," said Stan, sitting down in the armchair next to Ernie's.

There was another tremendous BANG, and the next moment Harry found himself flat on his bed, thrown backward by the speed of the Knight Bus. Pulling himself up, Harry stared out of the dark window and saw that they were now bowling along a completely different street. Stan was watching Harry's stunned face with great enjoyment.

"This is where we was before you flagged us down," he said. "Where are we, Ern? Somewhere in Wales?"

"Ar," said Ernie.

"How come the Muggles don't hear the bus?" said Harry.

"Them!" said Stan contemptuously. "Don' listen properly, do they? Don' look properly either. Never notice nuffink, they don'."

"Best go wake up Madam Marsh, Stan," said Ern. "We'll be in Abergavenny in a minute."

Stan passed Harry's bed and disappeared up a narrow wooden staircase. Harry was still looking out of the window, feeling increasingly nervous. Ernie didn't seem to have mastered the use of a steering wheel. The Knight Bus kept mounting the pavement, but it didn't hit anything; lines of lampposts, mailboxes, and trash cans jumped out of its way as it approached and back into position once it had passed.

Stan came back downstairs, followed by a faintly green witch wrapped in a traveling cloak.

“‘Ere you go, Madam Marsh,” said Stan happily as Ern stamped on the brake and the beds slid a foot or so toward the front of the bus. Madam Marsh clamped a handkerchief to her mouth and tottered down the steps. Stan threw her bag out after her and rammed the doors shut; there was another loud BANG, and they were thundering down a narrow country lane, trees leaping out of the way.

Harry wouldn’t have been able to sleep even if he had been traveling on a bus that didn’t keep banging loudly and jumping a hundred miles at a time. His stomach churned as he fell back to wondering what was going to happen to him, and whether the Dursleys had managed to get Aunt Marge off the ceiling yet.

Stan had unfurled a copy of the *Daily Prophet* and was now reading with his tongue between his teeth. A large photograph of a sunken-faced man with long, matted hair blinked slowly at Harry from the front page. He looked strangely familiar.

“That man!” Harry said, forgetting his troubles for a moment. “He was on the Muggle news!”

Stan turned to the front page and chuckled.

“Sirius Black,” he said, nodding. “‘Course ‘e was on the Muggle news, Neville, where you been?”

He gave a superior sort of chuckle at the blank look on Harry’s face, removed the front page, and handed it to Harry.

“You oughta read the papers more, Neville.”

Harry held the paper up to the candlelight and read:

BLACK STILL AT LARGE

Sirius Black, possibly the most infamous prisoner ever to be held in Azkaban fortress, is still eluding capture, the Ministry of Magic confirmed today.

“We are doing all we can to recapture Black,” said the Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge, this morning, “and we beg the magical community to remain calm.”

Fudge has been criticized by some members of the International Federation of Warlocks for informing the Muggle Prime Minister of the crisis.

“Well, really, I had to, don’t you know,” said an irritable Fudge. “Black is mad. He’s a danger to anyone who crosses him, magic or Muggle. I have the Prime Minister’s assurance that he will not breathe a word of Black’s true identity to anyone. And let’s face it — who’d believe him if he did?”

While Muggles have been told that Black is carrying a gun (a kind of metal wand that Muggles use to kill each other), the magical community lives in fear of a massacre like that of twelve years ago, when Black murdered thirteen people with a single curse.

Harry looked into the shadowed eyes of Sirius Black, the only part of the sunken face that seemed alive. Harry had never met a vampire, but he had seen pictures of them in his Defense Against the Dark Arts classes, and Black, with his waxy white skin, looked just like one.

“Scary-lookin’ fmg, inee?” said Stan, who had been watching

Harry read.

“He murdered *thirteen people*,” said Harry, handing the page back to Stan, “with *one curse*?”

“Yep,” said Stan, “in front of witnesses an’ all. Broad daylight. Big trouble it caused, dinnit, Ern?”

“Ar,” said Ern darkly.

Stan swiveled in his armchair, his hands on the back, the better to look at Harry.

“Black woz a big supporter of You-Know-’Oo,” he said.

“What, Voldemort?” said Harry, without thinking.

Even Stan’s pimples went white; Ern jerked the steering wheel so hard that a whole farmhouse had to jump aside to avoid the bus.

“You outta your tree?” yelled Stan. “’Choo say ’is name for?”

“Sorry,” said Harry hastily. “Sorry, I — I forgot —”

“Forgot!” said Stan weakly. “Blimey, my ’eart’s goin’ that fast . . .”

“So — so Black was a supporter of You-Know-Who?” Harry prompted apologetically.

“Yeah,” said Stan, still rubbing his chest. “Yeah, that’s right. Very close to You-Know-’Oo, they say. Anyway, when little ’Arry Potter got the better of You-Know-’Oo —”

Harry nervously flattened his bangs down again.

“— all You-Know-’Oo’s supporters was tracked down, wasn’t they, Ern? Most of ’em knew it was all over, wiv You-Know-’Oo gone, and they came quiet. But not Sirius Black. I ’eard he thought ’e’d be second-in-command once You-Know-’Oo ’ad taken over.

“Anyway, they cornered Black in the middle of a street full of

Muggles, an' Black took out 'is wand and 'e blasted 'alf the street apart, an' a wizard got it, an' so did a dozen Muggles what got in the way. 'Orrible, eh? An' you know what Black did then?" Stan continued in a dramatic whisper.

"What?" said Harry.

"*Laughed*," said Stan. "Jus' stood there an' laughed. An' when reinforcements from the Ministry of Magic got there, 'e went wiv 'em quiet as anyfink, still laughing 'is 'ead off. 'Cos 'e's mad, inee, Ern? Inee mad?"

"If he weren't when he went to Azkaban, he will be now," said Ern in his slow voice. "I'd blow meself up before I set foot in that place. Serves him right, mind you... after what he did..."

"They 'ad a job coverin' it up, din' they, Ern?" Stan said. "'Ole street blown up an' all them Muggles dead! What was it they said 'ad 'appened, Ern?"

"Gas explosion," grunted Ernie.

"An' now 'e's out," said Stan, examining the newspaper picture of Black's gaunt face again. "Never been a breakout from Azkaban before, 'as there, Ern? Beats me 'ow 'e did it. Frightenin', eh? Mind, I don't fancy 'is chances against them Azkaban guards, eh, Ern?"

Ernie suddenly shivered.

"Talk about summat else, Stan, there's a good lad. Them Azkaban guards give me the collywobbles."

Stan put the paper away reluctantly, and Harry leaned against the window of the Knight Bus, feeling worse than ever. He couldn't help imagining what Stan might be telling his passengers in a few nights' time.

“‘Ear about that. ’Arry Potter? Blew up ’is aunt! We ’ad ’im ’ere on the Knight Bus, di’n’t we, Ern? ’E was tryin’ to run for it. . . .”

He, Harry, had broken Wizard law just like Sirius Black. Was inflating Aunt Marge bad enough to land him in Azkaban? Harry didn’t know anything about the wizard prison, though everyone he’d ever heard speak of it did so in the same fearful tone. Hagrid, the Hogwarts gamekeeper, had spent two months there only last year. Harry wouldn’t soon forget the look of terror on Hagrid’s face when he had been told where he was going, and Hagrid was one of the bravest people Harry knew.

The Knight Bus rolled through the darkness, scattering bushes and wastebaskets, telephone booths and trees, and Harry lay, restless and miserable, on his feather bed. After a while, Stan remembered that Harry had paid for hot chocolate, but poured it all over Harry’s pillow when the bus moved abruptly from Anglesea to Aberdeen. One by one, wizards and witches in dressing gowns and slippers descended from the upper floors to leave the bus. They all looked very pleased to go.

Finally, Harry was the only passenger left.

“Right then, Neville,” said Stan, clapping his hands, “whereabouts in London?”

“Diagon Alley,” said Harry.

“Righto,” said Stan. “‘Old tight, then. . . .”

BANG!

They were thundering along Charing Cross Road. Harry sat up and watched buildings and benches squeezing themselves out of the Knight Bus’s way. The sky was getting a little lighter. He would lie

low for a couple of hours, go to Gringotts the moment it opened, then set off — where, he didn't know.

Ern slammed on the brakes and the Knight Bus skidded to a halt in front of a small and shabby-looking pub, the Leaky Cauldron, behind which lay the magical entrance to Diagon Alley.

“Thanks,” Harry said to Ern.

He jumped down the steps and helped Stan lower his trunk and Hedwig's cage onto the pavement.

“Well,” said Harry. “Bye then!”

But Stan wasn't paying attention. Still standing in the doorway to the bus, he was goggling at the shadowy entrance to the Leaky Cauldron.

“*There* you are, Harry,” said a voice.

Before Harry could turn, he felt a hand on his shoulder. At the same time, Stan shouted, “Blimey! Ern, come 'ere! Come 'ere!”

Harry looked up at the owner of the hand on his shoulder and felt a bucketful of ice cascade into his stomach — he had walked right into Cornelius Fudge, the Minister of Magic himself.

Stan leapt onto the pavement beside them.

“What didja call Neville, Minister?” he said excitedly.

Fudge, a portly little man in a long, pinstriped cloak, looked cold and exhausted.

“Neville?” he repeated, frowning. “This is Harry Potter.”

“I knew it!” Stan shouted gleefully. “Ern! Ern! Guess 'oo Neville is, Ern! 'E's 'Arry Potter! I can see 'is scar!”

“Yes,” said Fudge testily, “well, I'm very glad the Knight Bus

picked Harry up, but he and I need to step inside the Leaky Cauldron now . . .”

Fudge increased the pressure on Harry’s shoulder, and Harry found himself being steered inside the pub. A stooping figure bearing a lantern appeared through the door behind the bar. It was Tom, the wizened, toothless landlord.

“You’ve got him, Minister!” said Tom. “Will you be wanting anything? Beer? Brandy?”

“Perhaps a pot of tea,” said Fudge, who still hadn’t let go of Harry.

There was a loud scraping and puffing from behind them, and Stan and Ern appeared, carrying Harry’s trunk and Hedwig’s cage and looking around excitedly.

““Ow come you di’n’t tell us ’oo you are, eh, Neville?” said Stan, beaming at Harry, while Ernie’s owlish face peered interestedly over Stan’s shoulder.

“And a *private* parlor, please, Tom,” said Fudge pointedly.

““Bye,” Harry said miserably to Stan and Ern as Tom beckoned Fudge toward the passage that led from the bar.

““Bye, Neville!” called Stan.

Fudge marched Harry along the narrow passage after Tom’s lantern, and then into a small parlor. Tom clicked his fingers, a fire burst into life in the grate, and he bowed himself out of the room.

“Sit down, Harry,” said Fudge, indicating a chair by the fire.

Harry sat down, feeling goose bumps rising up his arms despite the glow of the fire. Fudge took off his pinstriped cloak and tossed it aside, then hitched up the trousers of his bottle-green suit and sat

down opposite Harry.

“I am Cornelius Fudge, Harry. The Minister of Magic.”

Harry already knew this, of course; he had seen Fudge once before, but as he had been wearing his father’s Invisibility Cloak at the time, Fudge wasn’t to know that.

Tom the innkeeper reappeared, wearing an apron over his nightshirt and bearing a tray of tea and crumpets. He placed the tray on a table between Fudge and Harry and left the parlor, closing the door behind him.

“Well, Harry,” said Fudge, pouring out tea, “you’ve had us all in a right flap, I don’t mind telling you. Running away from your aunt and uncle’s house like that! I’d started to think . . . but you’re safe, and that’s what matters.”

Fudge buttered himself a crumpet and pushed the plate toward Harry.

“Eat, Harry, you look dead on your feet. Now then . . . You will be pleased to hear that we have dealt with the unfortunate blowing-up of Miss Marjorie Dursley. Two members of the Accidental Magic Reversal Squad were dispatched to Privet Drive a few hours ago. Miss Dursley has been punctured and her memory has been modified. She has no recollection of the incident at all. So that’s that, and no harm done.”

Fudge smiled at Harry over the rim of his teacup, rather like an uncle surveying a favorite nephew. Harry, who couldn’t believe his ears, opened his mouth to speak, couldn’t think of anything to say, and closed it again.

“Ah, you’re worrying about the reaction of your aunt and uncle?”

said Fudge. “Well, I won’t deny that they are extremely angry, Harry, but they are prepared to take you back next summer as long as you stay at Hogwarts for the Christmas and Easter holidays.”

Harry unstuck his throat.

“I *always* stay at Hogwarts for the Christmas and Easter holidays,” he said, “and I don’t ever want to go back to Privet Drive.”

“Now, now, I’m sure you’ll feel differently once you’ve calmed down,” said Fudge in a worried tone. “They are your family, after all, and I’m sure you are fond of each other — er — *very* deep down.”

It didn’t occur to Harry to put Fudge right. He was still waiting to hear what was going to happen to him now.

“So all that remains,” said Fudge, now buttering himself a second crumpet, “is to decide where you’re going to spend the last three weeks of your vacation. I suggest you take a room here at the Leaky Cauldron and —”

“Hang on,” blurted Harry. “What about my punishment?”

Fudge blinked.

“Punishment?”

“I broke the law!” Harry said. “The Decree for the Restriction of Underage Wizardry!”

“Oh, my dear boy, we’re not going to punish you for a little thing like that!” cried Fudge, waving his crumpet impatiently. “It was an accident! We don’t send people to Azkaban just for blowing up their aunts!”

But this didn’t tally at all with Harry’s past dealings with the Ministry of Magic.

“Last year, I got an official warning just because a house-elf smashed a pudding in my uncle’s house!” he told Fudge, frowning. “The Ministry of Magic said I’d be expelled from Hogwarts if there was any more magic there!”

Unless Harry’s eyes were deceiving him, Fudge was suddenly looking awkward.

“Circumstances change, Harry. . . . We have to take into account . . . in the present climate . . . Surely you don’t *want* to be expelled?”

“Of course I don’t,” said Harry.

“Well then, what’s all the fuss about?” laughed Fudge. “Now, have a crumpet, Harry, while I go and see if Tom’s got a room for you.”

Fudge strode out of the parlor and Harry stared after him. There was something extremely odd going on. Why had Fudge been waiting for him at the Leaky Cauldron, if not to punish him for what he’d done? And now Harry came to think of it, surely it wasn’t usual for the Minister of Magic *himself* to get involved in matters of underage magic?

Fudge came back, accompanied by Tom the innkeeper.

“Room eleven’s free, Harry,” said Fudge. “I think you’ll be very comfortable. Just one thing, and I’m sure you’ll understand . . . I don’t want you wandering off into Muggle London, all right? Keep to Diagon Alley. And you’re to be back here before dark each night. Sure you’ll understand. Tom will be keeping an eye on you for me.”

“Okay,” said Harry slowly, “but why — ?”

“Don’t want to lose you again, do we?” said Fudge with a hearty laugh. “No, no . . . best we know where you are. . . . I mean . . .”

Fudge cleared his throat loudly and picked up his pinstriped cloak.

“Well, I’ll be off, plenty to do, you know. . . .”

“Have you had any luck with Black yet?” Harry asked.

Fudge’s finger slipped on the silver fastenings of his cloak.

“What’s that? Oh, you’ve heard — well, no, not yet, but it’s only a matter of time. The Azkaban guards have never yet failed . . . and they are angrier than I’ve ever seen them.”

Fudge shuddered slightly.

“So, I’ll say good-bye.”

He held out his hand and Harry, shaking it, had a sudden idea.

“Er — Minister? Can I ask you something?”

“Certainly,” said Fudge with a smile.

“Well, third years at Hogwarts are allowed to visit Hogsmeade, but my aunt and uncle didn’t sign the permission form. D’you think you could — ?”

Fudge was looking uncomfortable.

“Ah,” he said. “No, no, I’m very sorry, Harry, but as I’m not your parent or guardian —”

“But you’re the Minister of Magic,” said Harry eagerly. “If you gave me permission —”

“No, I’m sorry, Harry, but rules are rules,” said Fudge flatly. “Perhaps you’ll be able to visit Hogsmeade next year. In fact, I think it’s best if you don’t . . . yes . . . well, I’ll be off. Enjoy your stay, Harry.”

And with a last smile and shake of Harry’s hand, Fudge left the room. Tom now moved forward, beaming at Harry.

“If you’ll follow me, Mr. Potter,” he said, “I’ve already taken your things up. . . .”

Harry followed Tom up a handsome wooden staircase to a door with a brass number eleven on it, which Tom unlocked and opened for him.

Inside was a very comfortable-looking bed, some highly polished oak furniture, a cheerfully crackling fire and, perched on top of the wardrobe —

“Hedwig!” Harry gasped.

The snowy owl clicked her beak and fluttered down onto Harry’s arm.

“Very smart owl you’ve got there,” chuckled Tom. “Arrived about five minutes after you did. If there’s anything you need, Mr. Potter, don’t hesitate to ask.”

He gave another bow and left.

Harry sat on his bed for a long time, absentmindedly stroking Hedwig. The sky outside the window was changing rapidly from deep, velvety blue to cold, steely gray and then, slowly, to pink shot with gold. Harry could hardly believe that he’d left Privet Drive only a few hours ago, that he wasn’t expelled, and that he was now facing three completely Dursley-free weeks.

“It’s been a very weird night, Hedwig,” he yawned.

And without even removing his glasses, he slumped back onto his pillows and fell asleep.

Die Ridderbus

Dis eers etlike strate verder dat Harry op 'n lae muur in Magnoliasingel timekaarsak. Hy hyg na asem van die inspanning om die trommel te sleep. Hy sit doodstil na sy hart se wilde geklop en luister terwyl die woele nog steeds deur sy are bruis.

Na tien minute alleen in die donker straat, word hy egter deur 'n nuwe emosie oorweldig: paniek. Hoe hy dit ook al beskou, hy was nog nooit dieper in die moeilikheid nie. Hy is in 'n penarie, heeltemal alleen in die donker Moggelwêreld, met absoluut nêrens om heen te gaan nie. Die ergste van alles is dat hy 'n rukkie gelede ernstige toorwerk gedoen het, wat beteken dat hy vir seker uit Hogwarts geskors sal word. Hy het die De-kreet rakende die Beperkings op Minderjarige Towenaars so erg oortree dat hy verbaas is dat die Ministerie vir Towerkuns se verteenwoordigers nog nie op hom toegesak het nie.

Harry bewe terwyl hy op en af in Magnoliasingel kyk. Wat gaan van hom word? Gaan hy gearresteer word, of gaan hy net eenvoudig uit die towerwêreld verban word? Hy dink aan Ron en Hermien en sy hart sink nog verder. Harry is seker dat Ron en Hermien hom nou sou wou help, selfs al is hy dalk 'n misdadiger, maar hulle is albei oorsee, en sonder Hedwig is daar geen manier om hulle te kontak nie.

Hy het nie eens Moggelgeld nie. Daar is wel 'n bietjie towenaargoud in die geldsak onderin sy trommel, maar die res van die fortuin wat sy ouers vir hom nagelaat het, word in 'n kluis by die Edelgolt Towenaarbank in Londen gestoor. Hy sal sy trommel nooit tot in Londen kan sleep nie, behalwe . . .

Hy kyk na sy towerstaf wat hy nog steeds in sy hand vasklem. As hy reeds geskors is (nou klop sy hart pynlik vinnig), sal nog 'n bietjie toordery seker nie kwaad doen nie. Hy het mos die onsigbaarheidsmantel wat hy by sy pa geërf het – wat as hy die trommel toor tot dit so lig soos 'n veertjie is, en dit aan sy besemstok vasmaak, die mantel oor hom gooi en Londen toe vlieg? Dan kan hy die res van sy geld uit die kluis gaan trek en . . . sy lewe as uitgeworpene begin. Dit is 'n aaklige vooruitsig, maar hy kan nie vir altyd op hierdie muur bly sit nie, of hy sal binnekort vir

die Moggelpolisie moet verduidelik wat hy hier doen: in die middel van die nag, met 'n trommel vol towerboeke en 'n besemstok.

Harry maak sy trommel weer oop en vroetel rond op soek na die onsigbaarheidsmantel – maar voor hy dit kan kry, kom hy meteens regop en kyk vinnig om hom rond.

Daar was 'n vreemde prikkeling in sy nek wat Harry laat dink dat hy dopgehou word, maar die straat lyk verlate en daar skyn geen ligte uit enige van die groot, vierkantige huise nie.

Hy buk weer oor sy trommel, maar kom amper dadelik weer orent met sy towerstaf in sy hand geklem. Hy het iets gevoel eerder as gehoor: iemand of iets staan in die smal gang tussen die motorhuis en die heining agter hom. Harry loer deur vernoude oë na die donker stegie. As dit net wil beweeg, dan sal hy weet of dit bloot 'n rondloperkat is of – iets anders.

“Lumos,” mompel Harry, en 'n lig verskyn aan die punt van sy towerstaf en verblind hom amper. Hy hou dit hoog bo sy kop, en die grintstrooi van die mure van nommer twee glinster skielik, die motorhuis se deur blink, en tussen hulle sien Harry, heeltemal duidelik, die logge buitelyns van iets baie groots, met wyd gerekte glansende oë.

Harry tree agteruit. Sy bene tref die trommel sodat hy struikel. Hy steek sy arm uit om sy val te breek, sy towerstaf vlieg uit sy hand en hy val hard in die straatvoor.

Daar is 'n oorverdowende BOEM en Harry gooi sy hande op om sy oë teen 'n skielike verblindende lig te beskerm.

Met 'n kreet rol hy terug op die sypaadjie, net betyds. 'n Sekonde later kom 'n reusagtige paar wiele en hoofligte skreeuend tot stilstand net daar waar Harry gelê het. Hulle behoort, sien Harry toe hy sy kop lig, aan 'n skilpers trippeldekkerbus wat asof van nêrens verskyn het. Goue letters oor die voorruit spel die woorde: *Die Ridderbus*.

Vir 'n breukdeel van 'n sekonde wonder Harry of hy deurmekaar geslaan is deur sy val. Toe spring 'n kondukteur in 'n pers uniform uit die bus en begin om hard in die donker te praat.

“Welkom by die Ridderbus, noodvervoer vir die gestrande heks of toewenaar. Steek net jou towerstafhand uit, klim aan boord en ons neem jou waarheen jy ook al wil gaan. My naam is Daan Tolvermeyer en ek is vanaand jul kondukteur –”

Die kondukteur breek plotseling af. Hy het so pas vir Harry, wat nog steeds op die sypaadjie sit, gesien. Harry gryp sy towerstaf en kom orent. Van naby kan hy sien dat Daan Tolvermeyer net 'n paar jaar ouer as hy is; uiters agtien of negentien, met groot bakore en 'n hele paar puistes.

“Wat maak jy daar onner?” vra Daan, en laat vaar sy professionele houding.

“Geval,” sê Harry.

"Vir wat staan en val jy?" grinnik Daan.

"Ek het dit nie aspris gedoen nie," sê Harry verontwaardig. Een van die knieë van sy jeans is geskeur en die hand wat hy uitgesteek het om sy val te breek, is aan die bloei. Hy onthou meteens waarom hy geval het en draai vinnig om om na die stegie tussen die motorhuis en die heining te tuur. In die bus se hoofligte is dit helder verlig, en dit is leeg.

"Wa'n kyk jy?" vra Daan.

"Daar was 'n groot swart ding," sê Harry en wys onseker na die gange-
tjie. "Soos 'n hond . . . maar massief . . ."

Hy kyk om na Daan wie se mond effens oophang. Dis met 'n onrustige gevoel dat Harry sien hoe Daan se oë na die litteken op Harry se voorkop beweeg.

"Watsit da' op jou kop?" vra Daan kortaf.

"Niks," sê Harry vinnig en stryk sy hare plat oor sy litteken. As die Ministerie vir Towerkuns op soek is na hom, gaan hy dit beslis nie vir hulle maklik maak nie.

"Wat's jou naam?" hou Daan vol.

"Neville Loggerenberg," sê Harry die eerste naam wat in sy kop kom. "Dus – dus hierdie bus," gaan hy vinnig voort in die hoop om Daan se aandag af te trek, "het jy gesê dit gaan na enige plek?"

"Jip," sê Daan trots, "wa'heen jy ook al wil gaan, solank dit op land is. Kan niks onnerwater doen nie. Hei," sê hy, en hy lyk weer eens agterdogtig, "jy het duimgegooi, of hoe? Jou towerstafhand uitgesteek, nè?"

"Ja," sê Harry vinnig. "Luister, hoeveel kos dit om Londen toe te gaan?"

"Elf Sekels," sê Daan, "ma' vir de'tien kry jy 'n warm sjokoladedrankie en vir vyftien kry jy 'n warmwaterbottel en 'n tannebo'sel in die kleur wat jy verkies."

Harry vroetel weer eens in sy trommel, haal sy geldsak uit en skud 'n paar stukke silwer in Daan se hand uit. Toe lig hy en Daan sy trommel, met Hedwig se kou bo-op gebalanseer, by die bus se trappe op.

Daar is geen sitplekke nie; net 'n halfdosyn koperkatels langs vensters met gordyne voor. Kerse in klampe langs elke bed verlig die houtpanele teen die mure. 'n Klein towenaartjie met 'n slaapmus, agterin die bus, mompel, "Nie nou nie, dankie, ek is besig om doplose slakke te piekel," en rol om in sy slaap.

"Jy kan hie'die een kry," fluister Daan, terwyl hy Harry se trommel onder die bed instoot, reg agter die bestuurder wat in 'n leunstoel by die stuurwiel sit. "Dit is ons bestuurder, Ernst Ongeluck. Dit is Neville Loggerenberg, Ernst."

Ernst Ongeluck, 'n bejaarde towenaar met baie dik brilglase, knik vir Harry wat sy kuif senuagtig platdruk en op sy bed gaan sit.

"Weg is ons, Ernst," sê Daan en gaan sit in die leunstoel langs Ernst se'n.

Daar is nog 'n enorme BOEM, en die volgende oomblik lê Harry plat op sy bed, agteroor gegooi deur die spoed waarmee die Ridderbus weggetrek het. Harry sukkel orent en kyk deur die venster om te sien dat hulle nou deur 'n heel ander straat jaag. Daan hou Harry se verstomde gesig met groot behae dop.

"Dis waar ons was toe jy gewaai het dat ons moet kom," sê hy. "Waa's ons, Ern? Iewers in Wallis?"

"Hm," sê Ernst.

"Hoekom hoor die Moggels nie die bus nie?" vra Harry.

"Hulle!" sê Daan minagtend. "Luister nie behoorlik nie, dis wat. Kyk ook nie behoorlik nie. Sien nooit niks raak nie."

"Maak solank vir Madame Marsch wakker, Daan," sê Ernst. "Ons is amper in Abergavenny."

Daan stap verby Harry se bed en verdwyn met 'n smal houstrap op. Harry, wat nog steeds deur die venster kyk, voel al hoe meer onrustig. Dis of Ernst nie werklik weet hoe om 'n stuurwiel te hanteer nie. Die Ridderbus beland gedurig op die sypaadjie, maar dit tref darem niks nie; soos dit nader kom, spring rye lamppale, posbusse en vullisdromme uit die pad en weer terug in posisie sodra dit verby is.

Daan kom weer ondertoe, gevolg deur 'n groenerige heks wat in 'n reismantel toegewikkel is.

"Hie's ons, Madame Marsch," sê Daan tevrede, terwyl Ernst die remtrap sodat die beddens 'n paar treë vorentoe skuif. Madame Marsch hou 'n sakdoek voor haar mond en strompel af met die trappe. Daan gooi haar tas agterna en klap die deure toe; daar is nog 'n harde BOEM en toe dreun hulle met 'n smal plaaspaadjie langs, met bome wat links en regs uit die pad spring.

Harry sou nie geslaap het nie, al was hy ook op 'n bus wat nie die hele tyd harde knalle los en 'n honderd kilometer ver op 'n slag spring nie. Sy maag draai toe hy opnuut begin wonder wat nou met hom gaan gebeur, en of die Dursleys al daarin geslaag het om tant Marge van die plafon af te kry.

Daan vou 'n eksemplaar van die *Daaglikse Profeet* oop en is besig om dit met sy tong tussen sy tande te lees. 'n Groot foto op die voorblad van 'n man met 'n versonke gesig en lang, gekoekte hare, knipoog stadig vir Harry. Hy lyk vaagweg bekend.

"Daardie man!" sê Harry, en vir 'n oomblik vergeet hy van sy probleem. "Hy was op die Moggels se nuus!"

Daan blaai na die voorblad en grinnik.

"Sirius Swardt," sê hy en knik. "Tuurlik was hy op die Moggels se nuus, Neville. Waar val jy uit?"

Hy gee 'n meerderwaardige soort laggie vir die onbegrypende uitdrukking op Harry se gesig, haal die voorblad af en gee dit vir Harry aan.

"Jy moet meer gereeld koerant lees, Neville."
Harry hou die koerant onder die kerslig en lees:

SWARDT STEEDS OP VRYE VOET

Sirius Swardt, waarskynlik die mees berugte gevangene wat nog ooit in Azkabanfort aangehou is, ontwyk steeds sy agtervolgers, het die Ministerie vir Towerkuns vandag bevestig.

"Ons doen alles in ons vermoë om Swardt weer in hegtenis te neem," het die Minister vir Towerkuns, Cornelius Broddelwerk, vanoggend gesê, "en ons vra die towergemeenskap om kalm te bly."

Broddelwerk is deur sommige lede van die Internasionale Federasie vir Towenaars gekritiseer omdat hy die Moggels se Eerste Minister van die krisis verwittig het.

"Wel, ek moes regtig, weet jy," het Broddelwerk ergerlik gesê. "Swardt is mal. Hy's 'n gevaar vir almal wat in sy pad kom, towenaars of Moggels. Ek het die Eerste Minister se versekering dat hy nie 'n woord oor Swardt se ware identiteit sal laat uitlek nie. En laat ons nugter wees – wie sal hom glo as hy iets sou sê?"

Terwyl die Moggels meegedeel is dat Swardt 'n wapen by hom het ('n soort metaalswaard wat Moggels gebruik om mekaar mee dood te maak), leef die towergemeenskap in vrees vir 'n herhaling van die slagting van twaalf jaar gelede toe Swardt dertien mense met 'n enkele vloek vermoor het."

Harry kyk na Sirius Swardt se donker oë, die enigste deel van die vervalle gesig wat lyk of dit lewend is. Harry het nog nooit 'n vampier gesien nie, maar hy het wel foto's van hulle in sy Verdediging teen die Donker Kuns-te klas gesien, en Swardt, met sy wasagtige wit vel, lyk net soos een.

"Skrikaanjaende gedoente, nê?" sê Daan, wat kyk terwyl Harry lees.

"Hy het dertien mense vermoor?" sê Harry toe hy die bladsy vir Daan teruggee, "met een vloek?"

"Jip," sê Daan. "Nogal voor getuies. Helder oordag. Groot moeilikheid veroorsaak, nê, Ernst?"

"Hm," sê Ernst onheilspellend.

Daan swaai om in sy leunstoel met sy hande op die rugleuning sodat hy beter na Harry kan kyk.

"Swardt was 'n groot ondersteuner van Jy-Weet-Wie," sê hy.

"Wie, Woldemort?" sê Harry sonder om te dink.

Tot Daan se puisies word wit; Ernst ruk die stuurwiel met soveel geweld dat 'n hele plaashuis uit die bus se pad moet spring.

"Is jy van jou kop af?" kerm Daan. "Vi' wat staan en sê jy sy naam?"

"Jammer," sê Harry haastig. "Jammer, ek – ek het vergeet –"

"Ve'geet!" sê Daan swakkies. "Genade, my hart klop so vinnig..."

“Dus – dus Swardt was ’n ondersteuner van Jy-Weet-Wie?” moedig Harry hom verskonend aan.

“Ja,” sê Daan en hy vryf sy borskas. “Ja, dis reg. Baie na aan Jy-Weet-Wie, so sê hulle . . . in elk geval, toe klein Harry Potter met Jy-Weet-Wie klaargespeel het” – Harry druk nogeens sy kuif benoud plat – “toe’s al Jy-Weet-Wie se ondersteuners opgespoor, is mos so, nè, Ernst? Die meeste van hulle’t geweet als is oor met dié dat Jy-Weet-Wie weg is, en hulle’t sommer oorgegee. Net Sirius Swardt nie. Ekt gehoor hy’t gedink hy sal tweede in bevel wees wanneer Jy-Weet-Wie oorneem.

“In elk geval, hulle’t Swardt in die middel van ’n straat vol Moggels vasgetrek en Swardt het sy towerstaf uitgehaal en die helfte van die straat afgemaai en ’n towenaar is dood en so ook ’n dosyn Moggels wat daar rondgestaan het. Aaklig, nè? En weet jy wat het Swardt toe gedoen?” gaan Daan in ’n dramatiese stem voort.

“Wat?” sê Harry.

“Gelag,” sê Daan. “Net daar gestaan en lag. En toe die versterkings van die Ministerie vir Towerkuns daar aankom, het hy saam met hulle gegaan sonder om hom teen te sit, maar hom steeds siek gelag. Want hy’s mal, of wat sê jy, Ernst? Is hy mal of wat?”

“As hy nie was toe hy Azkaban toe is nie, dan is hy nou,” sê Ernst in sy stadige stem. “Ek sal myself eerder opblaas voor ek ’n voet in daardie plek sit. Maar dis sy verdiende loon . . . na alles wat hy gedoen het . . .”

“Hulle’t omrent gesukkel om alles toe te smeer, nè, Ernst?” sê Daan. “Hele straat afgemaai en al daai dooie Moggels. Wat het hulle nou weer gesê het gebeur, Ernst?”

“Gas wat ontplof het,” grom Ernst.

“En nou’s hy uit,” sê Daan en hy bekyk weer die koerantfoto van Swardt se gehawende gesig. “Nog nooit iemand uit Azkaban ontsnap nie, het daar, Ernst? Weet nie hoe hy dit gedoen het nie. Maak ’n mens bang, nè? Maa’k moet sê ek dink nie hy’t ’n kans teen daai wagte van Azkaban nie, of wat sê jy, Ernst?”

Ernst sidder skielik.

“Praat tog oor iets anders, Daan. Daardie wagte van Azkaban gee my die horries.”

Daan sit die koerant traag neer en Harry leun teen die venster van die Ridderbus en voel nog erger as tevore. Hy kan nie anders as om hom in te dink aan wat Daan oor ’n paar nagte vir sy passasiers gaan vertel nie.

“Het julle gehoor van Harry Potter? Sy tante opgeblaas! Ons’t hom hier op die Ridderbus gehad, nè, Ernst? Het probeer weghol. . .”

Hy, Harry, het die towenaarswette gebreek, net soos Sirius Swardt. Is tant Marge se opblasery erg genoeg om hom in Azkaban te laat beland? Harry weet niks van die towenaarstronk nie, hoewel almal wat hy al daar-oor hoor praat het, ewe vreesbevang klink. Net die vorige jaar was Ha-

rid; Hogwarts se boswagter, vir twee maande daar. Harry sal die vrees op Hagrid se gesig, toe daar vir hom gesê is waarheen hy moet gaan, nie maklik vergeet nie, en Hagrid is een van die dapperste mense wat Harry ken. Die Ridderbus rol deur die duisternis sodat bosse en stutpale, telefoonhoekkies en bome wild uit die pad spring, en Harry lê rusteloos en onbetroostig op sy verebed. 'n Rukkie later onthou Daan dat Harry vir 'n warm sjokoladedrankie betaal het, maar hy stort alles oor Harry se kusning toe die bus skielik van Anglesea na Aberdeen beweeg. Townaars en hekse in kamerjasse en pantoffels kom een vir een van die boonste dekke af ondertoe om die bus te verlaat. Hulle lyk baie bly om te kan afklim.

Uiteindelik is Harry die enigste passasier wat oor is.

"Nou maar goed, Neville," sê Daan en hy klap sy hande, "watter deel van Londen?"

"Diagonaalstraat," sê Harry.

"Reg so," sê Daan, "hou vas, nè . . ."

BOEM!

Hulle dreun met Charing Crossweg af. Harry sit regop en kyk hoe geloue en banke langs die straat hulself klein maak om uit die Ridderbus se pad te kom. Die lug is besig om 'n bietjie helderder te word. Hy sal vir 'n paar uur iewers wegstrooi, na Edeldag gaan sodra dit oopmaak, en dan sal hy die pad vat – waarheen, weet hy nog nie.

Ernst slaan rem aan en die Ridderbus gly voor 'n klein en verwaarloosde kroeg tot stilstand. Dis Die Kokende Pot en die toweringang na Diagonaalstraat lê daaragter.

"Dankie," sê Harry vir Ernst.

Hy spring met die trappies af en help vir Daan om sy trommel en Hedwig se kou op die sypaadjie te kry.

"Goed," sê Harry, "tot siens!"

Daan se aandag is egter elders. Hy staan nog steeds in die bus se deur en staar met groot oë na die donker ingang van Die Kokende Pot.

"So daar is jy, Harry," sê 'n stem.

Voor Harry kan omdraai, voel hy 'n hand op sy skouer. Terselfdertyd hoor hy hoe Daan skree, "Jislaaik! Ernst, kom hier! Kom kyk!"

Harry kyk op om te sien wie se hand op sy skouer is, en voel hoe 'n emmer vol ys tot in sy maag val – hy het homself in niemand anders as Cornelius Broddelwerk, die Minister vir Towerkuns, vasgeloop nie.

Daan spring tot langs hulle op die sypaadjie.

"Wat het jy vir Neville genoem, Minister?" sê hy opgewonde.

Broddelwerk, 'n gesette mannetjie in 'n lang strepiesmantel, lyk koud en moeg.

"Neville?" herhaal hy en frons. "Dit is Harry Potter."

"Ek het dit geweet!" skree Daan triomfantlik. "Ernst! Ernst! Raai wie

is Neville nou eintlik, Ernst! Is Harry Potter! Ek kan sy litteken sien!”

“Ja,” sê Broddelwerk geïrriteerd. “Wel, ek is bly dat die Ridderbus vir Harry opgelaai het, maar ek en hy moet nou hier in Die Kokende Pos wees.”

Broddelwerk druk swaar op Harry se skouer en Harry voel hoe hy die kroeg binnegestuurd word. ’n Geboë figuur met ’n lantern verskyn in die deur agter die kroegtoonbank. Dit is Tom, die verrimpelde en tandelose eienaar.

“U het hom gekry, Minister!” sê Tom. “Enigiets vir u? Bier? Brandewyn?”

“Eerder ’n pot warm tee,” sê Broddelwerk, wat nog steeds nie vir Harry laat los nie.

Agter hulle klink ’n harde geskraap en ’n gesteun op, en Daan en Ernst verskyn met Harry se trommel en Hedwig se kou, en kyk opgewonde om hulle rond.

“Hoekom het jy nie vir ons gesê wie jy is nie, Neville?” sê Daan stralend aan Harry terwyl Ernst se uilgesig vol belangstelling oor Daan se skouer loer.

“Sowel as ’n *privaat* sitkamer, asseblief, Tom,” sê Broddelwerk met nadruk.

“Tot siens,” sê Harry mistroostig vir Daan en Ernst, terwyl Tom vir Broddelwerk na die gang wat uit die kroeg lei, wink.

“Tot siens, Neville!” roep Daan uit.

Broddelwerk laat Harry met die smal gang afstap, al agter Tom se lantern aan, tot in ’n klein sitkamertjie. Tom klik sy vingers, vlamme spring aan die brand in die vuurherd, en hy gaan buig-buig uit die vertrek.

“Sit, Harry,” sê Broddelwerk en wys na ’n stoel langs die vuur.

Harry gaan sit, en ten spyte van die vuur se gloed voel hy hoe die hoendervleis teen sy arms opkruip. Broddelwerk haal sy strepiesmantel af en gooi dit eenkant neer, toe trek hy die pype van sy bottelgroen broek op en gaan sit oorkant Harry.

“Ek is Cornelius Broddelwerk, Harry. Die Minister vir Towerkuns.”

Harry weet dit natuurlik reeds; hy het Broddelwerk al tevore gesien, maar omdat hy toe sy pa se onsigbaarheidsmantel aangehad het, moet Broddelwerk liever nie daarvan weet nie.

Tom, die herbergier, verskyn weer met ’n voorskoot oor sy naghemp en ’n skinkbord met tee en plaatkoekies. Hy sit die skinkbord op die tafel tussen Broddelwerk en Harry neer, en toe hy uitstap, trek hy die deur agter hom toe.

“Wel, Harry,” sê Broddelwerk terwyl hy die tee skink, “ek moet sê, jy het ons almal baie groot laat skrik. Om sommer net weg te loop van jou oom en tante se huis! Ek het begin dink . . . maar jy is veilig, en dit is al wat tel.”

Broddelwerk smeer botter op 'n plaatkoekie en stoot die bord na Harry toe.

"Het, Harry, jy lyk gedaan. Nou toe . . . Jy sal bly wees om te hoor dat ons die ongelukkige opblasery van me. Marge Dursley reggestel het. Twee lede van die Departement vir die Regstelling van Toevallige Towery is 'n paar uur gelede na Ligusterlaan gestuur. Me. Dursley is geprik, en haar geheue is aangepas. Sy kan die voorval glad nie onthou nie, dus is geen skade gedoen nie."

Broddelwerk glimlag oor die rand van sy teekoppie vir Harry, baie soos 'n oom wat na 'n gunstelingnefie kyk. Harry, wat sy ore nie kan glo nie, maak sy mond oop om iets te sê, kan aan niks dink nie, en maak dit weer toe.

"Aha, jy is bekommerd oor jou oom en tante se reaksie?" sê Broddelwerk. "Wel, ek kan nie ontken dat hulle bitter kwaad is nie, Harry, maar hulle is bereid om jou volgende somer terug te neem mits jy vir Kersfees en oor die Paasvakansie by Hogwarts bly."

Harry se keel begin weer werk.

"Ek bly *altyd* by Hogwarts oor Kersfees en vir die Paasvakansie," sê hy, "en ek wil nooit weer na Ligusterlaan toe gaan nie."

"Toe, toe, ek is seker jy sal anders voel as jy eers 'n bietjie bedaar het," sê Broddelwerk in 'n bekommerde stem. "Hulle is na alles jou familie, en ek is seker julle is geheg aan mekaar – h'm – op 'n baie diep manier."

Harry dink nie daaraan om vir Broddelwerk reg te help nie. Hy wag tog steeds om te hoor wat nou met hom gaan gebeur.

"Al wat dus oorbly," sê Broddelwerk, terwyl hy botter op 'n tweede plaatkoekie smeer, "is om te besluit waar jy die laaste twee weke van jou vakansie gaan deurbring. Ek stel voor dat jy 'n kamer hier in Die Koken-de Pot huur en –"

"Wag 'n bietjie," blaker Harry dit uit, "wat van my straf?"

Broddelwerk knipper sy oë.

"Straf?"

"Ek het die wet oortree!" sê Harry. "Die Dekreet rakende die Beperkings op Minderjarige Townaars!"

"O, maar my liewe seun, ons gaan jou tog nie straf vir 'n geringe oortreding soos hierdie een nie!" roep Broddelwerk uit, terwyl hy sy plaatkoekie ongeduldig deur die lug waai. "Dit was 'n ongeluk! Ons stuur nie mense na Azkaban bloot omdat hulle hul tantes opgeblaas het nie!"

Dit strook glad nie met Harry se vorige ervaring van die Ministerie vir Towerkuns nie.

"Verlede jaar het ek 'n amptelike waarskuwing gehad net omdat 'n huis-elf met 'n poeding in my oom-hulle se huis gemors het!" sê Harry fronsend. "Die Ministerie vir Towerkuns het gesê ek sal uit Hogwarts geskors word as daar enige verdere towery plaasvind!"

Tensy Harry se oë hom bedrieg, lyk Broddelwerk skielik ongemaklik.

“Omstandighede verander, Harry . . . ons moet in ag neem . . . in die huidige omstandighede . . . maar jy wil darem seker nie geskors word nie, of hoe?”

“Natuurlik wil ek nie,” sê Harry.

“Wel, waarom gaan die bohaai dan?” sê Broddelwerk ligtelik en hy lag. “Kry ’n plaatkoekie, Harry, terwyl ek gou gaan kyk of Tom vir jou ’n kamer het.”

Broddelwerk stap uit die sitkamer en Harry staar hom agterna. Iets baie vreemds is aan die gang. Hoekom het Broddelwerk hom by Die Kokende Pot ingewag as hy hom nie gaan straf oor wat hy gedoen het nie? En hoe meer Harry daaroor dink, hoe vreemder klink dit dat die Minister vir Towerkuns self by sake rakende minderjarige towery betrokke raak.

Net toe kom Broddelwerk terug, vergesel van Tom die herbergier.

“Kamer elf is beskikbaar, Harry,” sê Broddelwerk. “Ek dink jy sal baie gerieflik daar wees. Daar is net een ding, en ek is seker jy sal verstaan: ek wil nie hê dat jy in die Moggels se deel van Londen moet rondloop nie, reg? Bly in Diagonaalstraat. En sorg dat jy elke aand voor donker hier is. Ek is seker jy sal verstaan. Tom sal namens my ’n ogie oor jou hou.”

“Goed,” sê Harry stadig, “maar hoekom –?”

“Wil jou nie weer verloor nie, wil ons?” sê Broddelwerk en lag hartlik.

“Nee, nee . . . dis beter dat ons weet waar jy is . . . ek bedoel . . .”

Broddelwerk maak sy keel hard skoon en tel sy strepiesmantel op.

“Wel, ek moet gaan, baie om te doen, jy weet.”

“Het hulle al vir Swardt gevang?” vra Harry.

Broddelwerk se vingers glip op die silwer hakies aan sy mantel.

“Wat sê jy daar? O, jy het gehoor – wel, nee, nog nie, maar dis net ’n kwessie van tyd. Azkaban se wagte het nog nooit misluk nie . . . en hulle is kwater as wat ek hulle nog ooit gesien het.”

Broddelwerk sidder ligweg.

“Ek sê dan tot siens.”

Hy hou sy hand uit en toe Harry dit skud, kry hy skielik ’n gedagte.

“H’m, Minister? Mag ek iets vra?”

“Sekerlik,” sê Broddelwerk met ’n glimlag.

“Wel, derdejaars by Hogwarts mag na Hogsmeade toe gaan, maar my oom en tante het nie die toestemmingsvorm geteken nie. Kan u dit dalk doen?”

Broddelwerk lyk ongemaklik.

“H’m,” sê hy. “Nee. Nee, ek is baie jammer, Harry, maar siende dat ek nie jou ouer of voog is nie –”

“Maar u is die Minister vir Towerkuns,” sê Harry gretig. “As u vir my toestemming gee –”

“Nee, ek is jammer, Harry, maar reëls is reëls,” sê Broddelwerk botweg.

"Dalk kan jy volgende jaar Hogsmeade toe gaan. Om die waarheid te sê, ek dink dis beter as jy nie. . . ja . . . wel, ek moet gaan. Geniet jou besoek, Harry."

Met 'n laaste glimlag en 'n skud van Harry se hand verlaat Broddelwek die vertrek. Nou kom Tom nader en glimlag stralend vir Harry.

"Volg my, asseblief, mnr. Potter," sê hy. "Ek het jou bagasie reeds opgeneem. . ."

Harry loop agter Tom aan met 'n elegante houttrap na bo tot by 'n deur met 'n kopernommer elf op, wat Tom oopsluit en vir hom oophou.

Binne-in is 'n bed wat baie gerieflik lyk, 'n paar stukke blink gepolierde eikehoutmeubels, 'n vuur wat vrolik knetter en, aan die bokant van die kas, klou –

"Hedwig!" sê Harry en snak na asem.

Die sneeu-uil klik met haar snawel en fladder af na Harry se arm.

"Baie slim uil wat jy daar het," kekkel Tom. "Het so vyf minute na jou hier aangekom. As daar enigiets is wat jy nodig het, mnr. Potter, vra net."

Hy buig weer en gaan uit.

Harry sit vir 'n lang tyd in gedagtes versonke op sy bed, en streel vir Hedwig. Die lug voor die venster is vinnig besig om te verander van diep fluweelblou na 'n koue staalgrys en toe, stadig, na pienk met goue strepe. Harry kan nie glo dat hy net 'n paar uur gelede by Ligusterlaan weg is nie, dat hy nie geskors is nie, en dat hy vir twee weke heeltemal sonder die Dursleys gaan wees nie.

"Dit was 'n baie eienaardige nag, Hedwig," sê hy en gaap.

Toe, sonder om eens sy bril af te haal, sak hy terug teen die kussings en raak aan die slaap.

CHAPTER FOUR



THE LEAKY CAULDRON

It took Harry several days to get used to his strange new freedom. Never before had he been able to get up whenever he wanted or eat whatever he fancied. He could even go wherever he pleased, as long as it was in Diagon Alley, and as this long cobbled street was packed with the most fascinating Wizarding shops in the world, Harry felt no desire to break his word to Fudge and stray back into the Muggle world.

Harry ate breakfast each morning in the Leaky Cauldron, where he liked watching the other guests: funny little witches from the country, up for a day's shopping; venerable-looking wizards arguing over the latest article in *Transfiguration Today*; wild-looking warlocks;

raucous dwarfs; and once, what looked suspiciously like a hag, who ordered a plate of raw liver from behind a thick woollen balaclava.

After breakfast Harry would go out into the backyard, take out his wand, tap the third brick from the left above the trash bin, and stand back as the archway into Diagon Alley opened in the wall.

Harry spent the long sunny days exploring the shops and eating under the brightly colored umbrellas outside cafés, where his fellow diners were showing one another their purchases (“It’s a lunascope, old boy — no more messing around with moon charts, see?”) or else discussing the case of Sirius Black (“Personally, I won’t let any of the children out alone until he’s back in Azkaban”). Harry didn’t have to do his homework under the blankets by flashlight anymore; now he could sit in the bright sunshine outside Florean Fortescue’s Ice Cream Parlor, finishing all his essays with occasional help from Florean Fortescue himself, who, apart from knowing a great deal about medieval witch burnings, gave Harry free sundaes every half an hour.

Once Harry had refilled his money bag with gold Galleons, silver Sickles, and bronze Knuts from his vault at Gringotts, he had to exercise a lot of self-control not to spend the whole lot at once. He had to keep reminding himself that he had five years to go at Hogwarts, and how it would feel to ask the Dursleys for money for spellbooks, to stop himself from buying a handsome set of solid gold Gobstones (a Wizarding game rather like marbles, in which the stones squirt a nasty-smelling liquid into the other player’s face when they lose a point). He was sorely tempted, too, by the perfect, moving model of the galaxy in a large glass ball, which would have meant he

never had to take another Astronomy lesson. But the thing that tested Harry's resolution most appeared in his favorite shop, Quality Quidditch Supplies, a week after he'd arrived at the Leaky Cauldron.

Curious to know what the crowd in the shop was staring at, Harry edged his way inside and squeezed in among the excited witches and wizards until he glimpsed a newly erected podium, on which was mounted the most magnificent broom he had ever seen in his life.

"Just come out — prototype —" a square-jawed wizard was telling his companion.

"It's the fastest broom in the world, isn't it, Dad?" squeaked a boy younger than Harry, who was swinging off his father's arm.

"Irish International Side's just put in an order for seven of these beauties!" the proprietor of the shop told the crowd. "And they're favorites for the World Cup!"

A large witch in front of Harry moved, and he was able to read the sign next to the broom:

THE FIREBOLT

This state-of-the-art racing broom sports a streamlined, superfine handle of ash, treated with a diamond-hard polish and hand-numbered with its own registration number. Each individually selected birch twig in the broomtail has been honed to aerodynamic perfection, giving the Firebolt unsurpassable balance and pinpoint precision. The Firebolt has an acceleration of 150 miles an hour in ten seconds and incorporates an unbreakable Braking Charm. Price on request.

Price on request . . . Harry didn't like to think how much gold the Firebolt would cost. He had never wanted anything as much in his whole life — but he had never lost a Quidditch match on his Nimbus Two Thousand, and what was the point in emptying his Gringotts vault for the Firebolt, when he had a very good broom already? Harry didn't ask for the price, but he returned, almost every day after that, just to look at the Firebolt.

There were, however, things that Harry needed to buy. He went to the Apothecary to replenish his store of potions ingredients, and as his school robes were now several inches too short in the arm and leg, he visited Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions and bought new ones. Most important of all, he had to buy his new schoolbooks, which would include those for his two new subjects, Care of Magical Creatures and Divination.

Harry got a surprise as he looked in at the bookshop window. Instead of the usual display of gold-embossed spellbooks the size of paving slabs, there was a large iron cage behind the glass that held about a hundred copies of *The Monster Book of Monsters*. Torn pages were flying everywhere as the books grappled with each other, locked together in furious wrestling matches and snapping aggressively.

Harry pulled his booklist out of his pocket and consulted it for the first time. *The Monster Book of Monsters* was listed as the required book for Care of Magical Creatures. Now Harry understood why Hagrid had said it would come in useful. He felt relieved; he had been wondering whether Hagrid wanted help with some terrifying new pet.

As Harry entered Flourish and Blotts, the manager came hurrying toward him.

“Hogwarts?” he said abruptly. “Come to get your new books?”

“Yes,” said Harry, “I need —”

“Get out of the way,” said the manager impatiently, brushing Harry aside. He drew on a pair of very thick gloves, picked up a large, knobbly walking stick, and proceeded toward the door of the *Monster Books*’ cage.

“Hang on,” said Harry quickly, “I’ve already got one of those.”

“Have you?” A look of enormous relief spread over the manager’s face. “Thank heavens for that. I’ve been bitten five times already this morning —”

A loud ripping noise rent the air; two of the *Monster Books* had seized a third and were pulling it apart.

“Stop it! Stop it!” cried the manager, poking the walking stick through the bars and knocking the books apart. “I’m never stocking them again, never! It’s been bedlam! I thought we’d seen the worst when we bought two hundred copies of the *Invisible Book of Invisibility* — cost a fortune, and we never found them. . . . Well . . . is there anything else I can help you with?”

“Yes,” said Harry, looking down his booklist, “I need *Unfogging the Future* by Cassandra Vablatsky.”

“Ah, starting Divination, are you?” said the manager, stripping off his gloves and leading Harry into the back of the shop, where there was a corner devoted to fortune-telling. A small table was stacked with volumes such as *Predicting the Unpredictable: Insulate Yourself Against Shocks* and *Broken Balls: When Fortunes Turn*

Foul.

“Here you are,” said the manager, who had climbed a set of steps to take down a thick, black-bound book. “*Unfogging the Future*. Very good guide to all your basic fortune-telling methods — palmistry, crystal balls, bird entrails —”

But Harry wasn’t listening. His eyes had fallen on another book, which was among a display on a small table: *Death Omens: What to Do When You Know the Worst Is Coming*.

“Oh, I wouldn’t read that if I were you,” said the manager lightly, looking to see what Harry was staring at. “You’ll start seeing death omens everywhere. It’s enough to frighten anyone to death.”

But Harry continued to stare at the front cover of the book; it showed a black dog large as a bear, with gleaming eyes. It looked oddly familiar. . . .

The manager pressed *Unfogging the Future* into Harry’s hands.

“Anything else?” he said.

“Yes,” said Harry, tearing his eyes away from the dog’s and dazedly consulting his booklist. “Er — I need *Intermediate Transfiguration* and *The Standard Book of Spells, Grade Three*.”

Harry emerged from Flourish and Blotts ten minutes later with his new books under his arms and made his way back to the Leaky Cauldron, hardly noticing where he was going and bumping into several people.

He tramped up the stairs to his room, went inside, and tipped his books onto his bed. Somebody had been in to tidy; the windows were open and sun was pouring inside. Harry could hear the buses rolling by in the unseen Muggle street behind him and the sound of the

invisible crowd below in Diagon Alley. He caught sight of himself in the mirror over the basin.

“It can’t have been a death omen,” he told his reflection defiantly. “I was panicking when I saw that thing in Magnolia Crescent. . . . It was probably just a stray dog. . . .”

He raised his hand automatically and tried to make his hair lie flat.

“You’re fighting a losing battle there, dear,” said his mirror in a wheezy voice.

As the days slipped by, Harry started looking wherever he went for a sign of Ron or Hermione. Plenty of Hogwarts students were arriving in Diagon Alley now, with the start of term so near. Harry met Seamus Finnigan and Dean Thomas, his fellow Gryffindors, in Quality Quidditch Supplies, where they too were ogling the Firebolt; he also ran into the real Neville Longbottom, a round-faced, forgetful boy, outside Flourish and Blotts. Harry didn’t stop to chat; Neville appeared to have mislaid his booklist and was being told off by his very formidable-looking grandmother. Harry hoped she never found out that he’d pretended to be Neville while on the run from the Ministry of Magic.

Harry woke on the last day of the holidays, thinking that he would at least meet Ron and Hermione tomorrow, on the Hogwarts Express. He got up, dressed, went for a last look at the Firebolt, and was just wondering where he’d have lunch, when someone yelled his name and he turned.

“Harry! HARRY!”

They were there, both of them, sitting outside Florean Fortescue’s

Ice Cream Parlor — Ron looking incredibly freckly, Hermione very brown, both waving frantically at him.

“Finally!” said Ron, grinning at Harry as he sat down. “We went to the Leaky Cauldron, but they said you’d left, and we went to Flourish and Blotts, and Madam Malkin’s, and —”

“I got all my school stuff last week,” Harry explained. “And how come you knew I’m staying at the Leaky Cauldron?”

“Dad,” said Ron simply.

Mr. Weasley, who worked at the Ministry of Magic, would of course have heard the whole story of what had happened to Aunt Marge.

“Did you *really* blow up your aunt, Harry?” said Hermione in a very serious voice.

“I didn’t mean to,” said Harry, while Ron roared with laughter. “I just — lost control.”

“It’s not funny, Ron,” said Hermione sharply. “Honestly, I’m amazed Harry wasn’t expelled.”

“So am I,” admitted Harry. “Forget expelled, I thought I was going to be arrested.” He looked at Ron. “Your dad doesn’t know why Fudge let me off, does he?”

“Probably ’cause it’s you, isn’t it?” shrugged Ron, still chuckling. “Famous Harry Potter and all that. I’d hate to see what the Ministry’d do to *me* if I blew up an aunt. Mind you, they’d have to dig me up first, because Mum would’ve killed me. Anyway, you can ask Dad yourself this evening. We’re staying at the Leaky Cauldron tonight too! So you can come to King’s Cross with us tomorrow! Hermione’s there as well!”

Hermione nodded, beaming. “Mum and Dad dropped me off this morning with all my Hogwarts things.”

“Excellent!” said Harry happily. “So, have you got all your new books and stuff?”

“Look at this,” said Ron, pulling a long thin box out of a bag and opening it. “Brand-new wand. Fourteen inches, willow, containing one unicorn tail-hair. And we’ve got all our books —” He pointed at a large bag under his chair. “What about those *Monster Books*, eh? The assistant nearly cried when we said we wanted two.”

“What’s all that, Hermione?” Harry asked, pointing at not one but three bulging bags in the chair next to her.

“Well, I’m taking more new subjects than you, aren’t I?” said Hermione. “Those are my books for Arithmancy, Care of Magical Creatures, Divination, Study of Ancient Runes, Muggle Studies —”

“What are you doing Muggle Studies for?” said Ron, rolling his eyes at Harry. “You’re Muggle-born! Your mum and dad are Muggles! You already know all about Muggles!”

“But it’ll be fascinating to study them from the Wizarding point of view,” said Hermione earnestly.

“Are you planning to eat or sleep at all this year, Hermione?” asked Harry, while Ron sniggered. Hermione ignored them.

“I’ve still got ten Galleons,” she said, checking her purse. “It’s my birthday in September, and Mum and Dad gave me some money to get myself an early birthday present.”

“How about a nice *book*?” said Ron innocently.

“No, I don’t think so,” said Hermione composedly. “I really want an owl. I mean, Harry’s got Hedwig and you’ve got Errol —”

"I haven't," said Ron. "Errol's a family owl. All I've got is Scabbers." He pulled his pet rat out of his pocket. "And I want to get him checked over," he added, placing Scabbers on the table in front of them. "I don't think Egypt agreed with him."

Scabbers was looking thinner than usual, and there was a definite droop to his whiskers.

"There's a magical creature shop just over there," said Harry, who knew Diagon Alley very well by now. "You could see if they've got anything for Scabbers, and Hermione can get her owl."

So they paid for their ice cream and crossed the street to the Magical Menagerie.

There wasn't much room inside. Every inch of wall was hidden by cages. It was smelly and very noisy because the occupants of these cages were all squeaking, squawking, jabbering, or hissing. The witch behind the counter was already advising a wizard on the care of double-ended newts, so Harry, Ron, and Hermione waited, examining the cages.

A pair of enormous purple toads sat gulping wetly and feasting on dead blowflies. A gigantic tortoise with a jewel-encrusted shell was glittering near the window. Poisonous orange snails were oozing slowly up the side of their glass tank, and a fat white rabbit kept changing into a silk top hat and back again with a loud popping noise. Then there were cats of every color, a noisy cage of ravens, a basket of funny custard-colored furballs that were humming loudly, and on the counter, a vast cage of sleek black rats that were playing some sort of skipping game using their long, bald tails.

The double-ended newt wizard left, and Ron approached the

counter.

“It’s my rat,” he told the witch. “He’s been a bit off-color ever since I brought him back from Egypt.”

“Bang him on the counter,” said the witch, pulling a pair of heavy black spectacles out of her pocket.

Ron lifted Scabbers out of his inside pocket and placed him next to the cage of his fellow rats, who stopped their skipping tricks and scuffled to the wire for a better look.

Like nearly everything Ron owned, Scabbers the rat was second-hand (he had once belonged to Ron’s brother Percy) and a bit battered. Next to the glossy rats in the cage, he looked especially woebegone.

“Hm,” said the witch, picking up Scabbers. “How old is this rat?”

“Dunno,” said Ron. “Quite old. He used to belong to my brother.”

“What powers does he have?” said the witch, examining Scabbers closely.

“Er —” The truth was that Scabbers had never shown the faintest trace of interesting powers. The witch’s eyes moved from Scabbers’s tattered left ear to his front paw, which had a toe missing, and tutted loudly.

“He’s been through the mill, this one,” she said.

“He was like that when Percy gave him to me,” said Ron defensively.

“An ordinary common or garden rat like this can’t be expected to live longer than three years or so,” said the witch. “Now, if you were looking for something a bit more hard-wearing, you might like one of these —”

She indicated the black rats, who promptly started skipping again. Ron muttered, "Show-offs."

"Well, if you don't want a replacement, you can try this rat tonic," said the witch, reaching under the counter and bringing out a small red bottle.

"Okay," said Ron. "How much — OUCH!"

Ron buckled as something huge and orange came soaring from the top of the highest cage, landed on his head, and then propelled itself, spitting madly, at Scabbers.

"NO, CROOKSHANKS, NO!" cried the witch, but Scabbers shot from between her hands like a bar of soap, landed splay-legged on the floor, and then scampered for the door.

"Scabbers!" Ron shouted, racing out of the shop after him; Harry followed.

It took them nearly ten minutes to catch Scabbers, who had taken refuge under a wastepaper bin outside Quality Quidditch Supplies. Ron stuffed the trembling rat back into his pocket and straightened up, massaging his head.

"What *was* that?"

"It was either a very big cat or quite a small tiger," said Harry.

"Where's Hermione?"

"Probably getting her owl —"

They made their way back up the crowded street to the Magical Menagerie. As they reached it, Hermione came out, but she wasn't carrying an owl. Her arms were clamped tightly around the enormous ginger cat.

"You *bought* that monster?" said Ron, his mouth hanging open.

“He’s *gorgeous*, isn’t he?” said Hermione, glowing.

That was a matter of opinion, thought Harry. The cat’s ginger fur was thick and fluffy, but it was definitely a bit bowlegged and its face looked grumpy and oddly squashed, as though it had run headlong into a brick wall. Now that Scabbers was out of sight, however, the cat was purring contentedly in Hermione’s arms.

“Hermione, that thing nearly scalped me!” said Ron.

“He didn’t mean to, did you, Crookshanks?” said Hermione.

“And what about Scabbers?” said Ron, pointing at the lump in his chest pocket. “He needs rest and relaxation! How’s he going to get it with that thing around?”

“That reminds me, you forgot your rat tonic,” said Hermione, slapping the small red bottle into Ron’s hand. “And stop *worrying*, Crookshanks will be sleeping in my dormitory and Scabbers in yours, what’s the problem? Poor Crookshanks, that witch said he’d been in there for ages; no one wanted him.”

“I wonder why,” said Ron sarcastically as they set off toward the Leaky Cauldron.

They found Mr. Weasley sitting in the bar, reading the *Daily Prophet*.

“Harry!” he said, smiling as he looked up. “How are you?”

“Fine, thanks,” said Harry as he, Ron, and Hermione joined Mr. Weasley with all their shopping.

Mr. Weasley put down his paper, and Harry saw the now-familiar picture of Sirius Black staring up at him.

“They still haven’t caught him, then?” he asked.

“No,” said Mr. Weasley, looking extremely grave. “They’ve pulled

us all off our regular jobs at the Ministry to try and find him, but no luck so far.”

“Would we get a reward if we caught him?” asked Ron. “It’d be good to get some more money —”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Ron,” said Mr. Weasley, who on closer inspection looked very strained. “Black’s not going to be caught by a thirteen-year-old wizard. It’s the Azkaban guards who’ll get him back, you mark my words.”

At that moment Mrs. Weasley entered the bar, laden with shopping bags and followed by the twins, Fred and George, who were about to start their fifth year at Hogwarts; the newly elected Head Boy, Percy; and the Weasleys’ youngest child and only girl, Ginny.

Ginny, who had always been very taken with Harry, seemed even more heartily embarrassed than usual when she saw him, perhaps because he had saved her life during their previous year at Hogwarts. She went very red and muttered “Hello” without looking at him. Percy, however, held out his hand solemnly as though he and Harry had never met and said, “Harry. How nice to see you.”

“Hello, Percy,” said Harry, trying not to laugh.

“I hope you’re well?” said Percy pompously, shaking hands. It was rather like being introduced to the mayor.

“Very well, thanks —”

“Harry!” said Fred, elbowing Percy out of the way and bowing deeply. “Simply *splendid* to see you, old boy —”

“Marvelous,” said George, pushing Fred aside and seizing Harry’s hand in turn. “Absolutely spiffing.”

Percy scowled.

“That’s enough, now,” said Mrs. Weasley.

“Mum!” said Fred as though he’d only just spotted her and seizing her hand too. “How really corking to see you —”

“I said, that’s enough,” said Mrs. Weasley, depositing her shopping in an empty chair. “Hello, Harry, dear. I suppose you’ve heard our exciting news?” She pointed to the brand-new silver badge on Percy’s chest. “Second Head Boy in the family!” she said, swelling with pride.

“And last,” Fred muttered under his breath.

“I don’t doubt that,” said Mrs. Weasley, frowning suddenly. “I notice they haven’t made you two prefects.”

“What do we want to be prefects for?” said George, looking revolted at the very idea. “It’d take all the fun out of life.”

Ginny giggled.

“You want to set a better example for your sister!” snapped Mrs. Weasley.

“Ginny’s got other brothers to set her an example, Mother,” said Percy loftily. “I’m going up to change for dinner. . . .”

He disappeared and George heaved a sigh.

“We tried to shut him in a pyramid,” he told Harry. “But Mum spotted us.”

Dinner that night was a very enjoyable affair. Tom the innkeeper put three tables together in the parlor, and the seven Weasleys, Harry, and Hermione ate their way through five delicious courses.

“How’re we getting to King’s Cross tomorrow, Dad?” asked Fred as they dug into a sumptuous chocolate pudding.

“The Ministry’s providing a couple of cars,” said Mr. Weasley. Everyone looked up at him.

“Why?” said Percy curiously.

“It’s because of you, Perce,” said George seriously. “And there’ll be little flags on the hoods, with HB on them —”

“— for Humongous Bighead,” said Fred.

Everyone except Percy and Mrs. Weasley snorted into their pudding.

“Why are the Ministry providing cars, Father?” Percy asked again, in a dignified voice.

“Well, as we haven’t got one anymore,” said Mr. Weasley, “— and as I work there, they’re doing me a favor —”

His voice was casual, but Harry couldn’t help noticing that Mr. Weasley’s ears had gone red, just like Ron’s did when he was under pressure.

“Good thing, too,” said Mrs. Weasley briskly. “Do you realize how much luggage you’ve all got between you? A nice sight you’d be on the Muggle Underground. . . . You are all packed, aren’t you?”

“Ron hasn’t put all his new things in his trunk yet,” said Percy, in a long-suffering voice. “He’s dumped them on my bed.”

“You’d better go and pack properly, Ron, because we won’t have much time in the morning,” Mrs. Weasley called down the table. Ron scowled at Percy.

After dinner everyone felt very full and sleepy. One by one they made their way upstairs to their rooms to check their things for the next day. Ron and Percy were next door to Harry. He had just closed and locked his own trunk when he heard angry voices through the

wall, and went to see what was going on.

The door of number twelve was ajar and Percy was shouting.

“It was *here*, on the bedside table, I took it off for polishing —”

“I haven’t touched it, all right?” Ron roared back.

“What’s up?” said Harry.

“My Head Boy badge is gone,” said Percy, rounding on Harry.

“So’s Scabbers’s rat tonic,” said Ron, throwing things out of his trunk to look. “I think I might’ve left it in the bar —”

“You’re not going anywhere till you’ve found my badge!” yelled Percy.

“I’ll get Scabbers’s stuff, I’m packed,” Harry said to Ron, and he went downstairs.

Harry was halfway along the passage to the bar, which was now very dark, when he heard another pair of angry voices coming from the parlor. A second later, he recognized them as Mr. and Mrs. Weasley’s. He hesitated, not wanting them to know he’d heard them arguing, when the sound of his own name made him stop, then move closer to the parlor door.

“... makes no sense not to tell him,” Mr. Weasley was saying heatedly. “Harry’s got a right to know. I’ve tried to tell Fudge, but he insists on treating Harry like a child. He’s thirteen years old and —”

“Arthur, the truth would terrify him!” said Mrs. Weasley shrilly. “Do you really want to send Harry back to school with that hanging over him? For heaven’s sake, he’s *happy* not knowing!”

“I don’t want to make him miserable, I want to put him on his guard!” retorted Mr. Weasley. “You know what Harry and Ron are like, wandering off by themselves — they’ve even ended up in the

Forbidden Forest! But Harry mustn't do that this year! When I think what could have happened to him that night he ran away from home! If the Knight Bus hadn't picked him up, I'm prepared to bet he would have been dead before the Ministry found him."

"But he's *not* dead, he's fine, so what's the point —"

"Molly, they say Sirius Black's mad, and maybe he is, but he was clever enough to escape from Azkaban, and that's supposed to be impossible. It's been a month, and no one's seen hide nor hair of him, and I don't care what Fudge keeps telling the *Daily Prophet*, we're no nearer catching Black than inventing self-spelling wands. The only thing we know for sure is what Black's after —"

"But Harry will be perfectly safe at Hogwarts."

"We thought Azkaban was perfectly safe. If Black can break out of Azkaban, he can break into Hogwarts."

"But no one's really sure that Black's after Harry —"

There was a thud on wood, and Harry was sure Mr. Weasley had banged his fist on the table.

"Molly, how many times do I have to tell you? They didn't report it in the press because Fudge wanted it kept quiet, but Fudge went out to Azkaban the night Black escaped. The guards told Fudge that Black's been talking in his sleep for a while now. Always the same words: 'He's at Hogwarts . . . he's at Hogwarts.' Black is deranged, Molly, and he wants Harry dead. If you ask me, he thinks murdering Harry will bring You-Know-Who back to power. Black lost everything the night Harry stopped You-Know-Who, and he's had twelve years alone in Azkaban to brood on that. . . ."

There was a silence. Harry leaned still closer to the door,

desperate to hear more.

“Well, Arthur, you must do what you think is right. But you’re forgetting Albus Dumbledore. I don’t think anything could hurt Harry at Hogwarts while Dumbledore’s headmaster. I suppose he knows about all this?”

“Of course he knows. We had to ask him if he minds the Azkaban guards stationing themselves around the entrances to the school grounds. He wasn’t happy about it, but he agreed.”

“Not happy? Why shouldn’t he be happy, if they’re there to catch Black?”

“Dumbledore isn’t fond of the Azkaban guards,” said Mr. Weasley heavily. “Nor am I, if it comes to that . . . but when you’re dealing with a wizard like Black, you sometimes have to join forces with those you’d rather avoid.”

“If they save Harry —”

“— then I will never say another word against them,” said Mr. Weasley wearily. “It’s late, Molly, we’d better go up. . . .”

Harry heard chairs move. As quietly as he could, he hurried down the passage to the bar and out of sight. The parlor door opened, and a few seconds later footsteps told him that Mr. and Mrs. Weasley were climbing the stairs.

The bottle of rat tonic was lying under the table they had sat at earlier. Harry waited until he heard Mr. and Mrs. Weasley’s bedroom door close, then headed back upstairs with the bottle.

Fred and George were crouching in the shadows on the landing, heaving with laughter as they listened to Percy dismantling his and Ron’s room in search of his badge.

“We’ve got it,” Fred whispered to Harry. “We’ve been improving it.”

The badge now read *Bighead Boy*.

Harry forced a laugh, went to give Ron the rat tonic, then shut himself in his room and lay down on his bed.

So Sirius Black was after him. That explained everything. Fudge had been lenient with him because he was so relieved to find him alive. He’d made Harry promise to stay in Diagon Alley where there were plenty of wizards to keep an eye on him. And he was sending two Ministry cars to take them all to the station tomorrow, so that the Weasleys could look after Harry until he was on the train.

Harry lay listening to the muffled shouting next door and wondered why he didn’t feel more scared. Sirius Black had murdered thirteen people with one curse; Mr. and Mrs. Weasley obviously thought Harry would be panic-stricken if he knew the truth. But Harry happened to agree wholeheartedly with Mrs. Weasley that the safest place on earth was wherever Albus Dumbledore happened to be. Didn’t people always say that Dumbledore was the only person Lord Voldemort had ever been afraid of? Surely Black, as Voldemort’s right-hand man, would be just as frightened of him?

And then there were these Azkaban guards everyone kept talking about. They seemed to scare most people senseless, and if they were stationed all around the school, Black’s chances of getting inside seemed very remote.

No, all in all, the thing that bothered Harry most was the fact that his chances of visiting Hogsmeade now looked like zero. Nobody would want Harry to leave the safety of the castle until Black was

caught; in fact, Harry suspected his every move would be carefully watched until the danger had passed.

He scowled at the dark ceiling. Did they think he couldn't look after himself? He'd escaped Lord Voldemort three times; he wasn't completely useless. . . .

Unbidden, the image of the beast in the shadows of Magnolia Crescent crossed his mind. *What to do when you know the worst is coming.* . . .

"I'm *not* going to be murdered," Harry said out loud.

"That's the spirit, dear," said his mirror sleepily.

Die Kokende Pot

Dit neem Harry 'n hele paar dae om gewoon te raak aan hierdie vreemde, nuwe vryheid. Hy kon nog nooit tevore opstaan net wanneer hy wil, of eet net waarvan hy hou nie. Hy kan selfs rondloop net waar hy wil, so lank dit in Diagonaalstraat is, en aangesien hierdie lang keisteestraat gepak is met die ongelooflikste towerwinkels in die wêreld, het Harry geen begeerte om sy woord teenoor Broddelwerk te breek en weg te glip na die Moggelwêreld nie.

Elke oggend as Harry ontbyt in Die Kokende Pot eet, is dit vir hom lekker om na die ander gaste te kyk: snaakse klein heksies van die platteland af, vir 'n dag se inkopies; eerbiedwaardige ou towenaars wat argumenteer oor die jongste artikel in *Transfigurasië Vandag*, woeste towenaars, raserige dwerge en een keer iemand soos 'n heks wat verdag gelyk het en 'n bord vol rou lewer van agter 'n dik wolbalaklawamus bestel het.

Na ontbyt gaan Harry uit na die agterplaas, neem sy towerstaf, tik teen die derde baksteen van links net bo die vullisdrom, en staan terug terwyl die poort wat na Diagonaalstraat lei, in die muur oopgaan.

Harry bring die lang sonnige dae in die winkels deur, en eet buite onder helderkleurige sambrele voor die kafees, waar sy mede-uiteters vir mekaar hul inkopies wys ("dis 'n lunaskoop, ou maat – niks meer van 'n gesukkel met maankaarte nie, sien?") of andersins die geval van Sirius Swardt bespreek ("persoonlik sal ek nie een van my kinders buite toelaat voor hy nie terug in Azkaban is nie"). Harry hoef nie meer sy huiswerk onder sy komberse by flitslig te doen nie; nou sit hy in die helder sonskyn buite by Fritz Friesmann se Roomspaleis sy opstelle en klaarmaak, terwyl hy so nou en dan deur niemand anders as Fritz Friesmann self gehelp word nie. Behalwe dat Fritz baie oor die Middeleeuse hekseverbrandery weet, gee hy vir Harry al om die halfuur 'n gratis vrugteroomys.

Nadat Harry sy geldsak vol goue Galjoene, silwer Sekels en brons Knoete uit sy kluis in Edelgolt gemaak het, moet hy homself omtrent inhou om alles nie onmiddellik uit te gee nie. Hy moet homself gedurig daaraan herinner dat hy vir nog vyf jaar na Hogwarts toe moet gaan, en hoe hy sal voel as hy vir die Dursleys geld moet vra vir towerboeke, om

te keer dat hy nie 'n pragtige stel Spoegklippe van soliede goud koop nie (n towenaarspeletjie baie soos albaster, maar waar die klippe 'n nare, stink vloerstof in die ander speler se gesig spuit wanneer hulle 'n punt verloor). 'n Volmaakte, bewegende model van die heelal in 'n groot glasbal is ook 'n groot versoeking, want dit sou beteken dat hy nooit weer na 'n Sterrekunde-klas hoef te gaan nie. Die swaarste toets vir Harry is egter 'n week na hy by Die Kokende Pot aangekom het, in sy gunstelingwinkel, Kwalityt Kwiddiek-toebehore.

Nuuskierig om te weet waarna die skare mense in die winkel kyk, druk Harry sy pad na binne en tussen die opgewonde hekse en towenaars deur tot hy 'n glimp kry van 'n pas opgerigte podium waarop die mees manjifieke besem wat hy nog in sy lewe gesien het, gemonteer is.

"Pas op die mark . . . prototipe . . ." vertel 'n towenaar met 'n vierkantige ken aan sy metgesel.

"Dis die vinnigste besem in die wêreld, of hoe, Pa?" piep 'n seun wat jonger as Harry is en aan sy pa se arm hang.

"Ierse Internasionale Span het so pas 'n bestelling vir sewe van hierdie huise geplaas!" vertel die eienaar van die winkel aan die skare. "En hulle is die gunsteling vir die Wêreldbeker!"

'n Groot heks voor Harry beweeg weg, en hy kan die bord langs die berrin lees:

DIE VUURSLAG

Hierdie ultramoderne resiesbesem spog met 'n vaartbelynde, supergepo-leerde steel van essehout, behandel met 'n diamantharde afwerking, en is met die hand met sy eie registrasienuommer gemerk. Elke individueel uitgesoekte berkehouttakkie in die stert van hierdie besemstok is afgeskuur tot aërodinamiese perfeksie, wat aan die Vuurslag sy onoortreflike balans en haarfyn presisie gee. Die Vuurslag versnel van 0-250 kilometer per uur binne tien sekondes en 'n onbreekbare remtower-spreuk is oor elke model uitgesprek. Prys op versoek.

Prys op versoek . . . Harry wil nie weet hoeveel goud die Vuurslag sal kos nie. In sy hele lewe wou hy iets nog nooit so graag hê nie – maar hy het nog nie 'n wedstryd op sy Nimbus Tweeduisend verloor nie, en hoekom sal hy sy kluis in Edलगolt leegmaak vir hierdie Vuurslag as hy alreeds 'n baie goeie besem het? Harry vra nie eens wat dit kos nie, maar hy kom amper elke dag terug net om na die Vuurslag te kyk.

Daar is egter goed wat Harry moet koop. Hy gaan na die apteek om sy voorraad bestanddele vir towerdrankies aan te vul, en omdat sy skoolklere nou etlike sentimeters te kort is in die bene en arms, gaan hy na Madame Malkin se Mantels vir alle Geleenthede en koop nuwes. Die be-

langrikste van alles wat hy moet koop, is sy nuwe skoolboeke, wat dié vir sy twee nuwe vakke, Versorging van Magiese Kreature sowel as Waarsêery, insluit.

Harry is verbaas toe hy in die boekwinkel se venster kyk. Pleks van die gewone uitstalling van met goud gebosseleerde towerboeke so groot soos plaveistene, is daar 'n groot ysterhok agter die glas met omtrent 'n honderd eksemplare van *Die Monsterboek van Monsters* daarin. Geskeurde bladsye vlieg die wêreld vol soos die boeke met mekaar worstel, vasval in verwoede stoeiegevegte, en aggressief na mekaar hap.

Harry haal sy boekelys uit sy sak en kyk vir die eerste keer daarna. *Die Monsterboek van Monsters* is gelys as die voorgeskrewe boek vir Versorging van Magiese Kreature. Nou verstaan Harry waarom Hagrid gesê het dat dit handig te pas sal kom. Hy is verlig; hy het gewonder of Hagrid dalk hulp met die een of ander vreesaanjaende nuwe troeteldier wil hê.

Toe Harry by Sierskrif en Klatt instap, kom die bestuurder haastig nader.

“Hogwarts?” sê hy kortaf. “Kom jy vir jou nuwe boeke?”

“Ja,” sê Harry. “Ek moet —”

“Uit die pad,” sê die bestuurder ongeduldig en stoot vir Harry eenkant toe. Hy trek 'n paar baie dik handskoene aan, tel 'n groot, knobbelrige kiere op en beweeg na die deur voor die Monsterboeke se hok.

“Wag eers,” sê Harry vinnig. “Ek het al een van daardies.”

“Het jy?” 'n Trek van die grootste verligting sprei oor die bestuurder se gesig. “Dank die vader daarvoor, ek is vanoggend al vyf keer gebyt —”

'n Deurdringende skeurgeluid klink op; twee van die Monsterboeke het 'n derde gegryp en is besig om dit uitmekaar te skeur.

“Hou op! Hou op!” gil die bestuurder, en steek die kiere deur die tralies en slaan die boeke uitmekaar. “Ek hou hulle nooit weer aan nie, nooit! Dis 'n malhuis! Ek het gedink ek het die ergste beleef toe ons tweehonderd eksemplare van *Die Onsigbare Boek oor Onsigbaarheid* aangekoop het — het 'n fortuin gekos, maar ons kon hulle nooit vind nie . . . Wel, is daar iets anders waarmee ek kan help?”

“Ja,” sê Harry en kyk na sy boekelys. “Ek soek *Ontnewel die Toekoms* deur Cassandra Vablatsky.”

“A, begin met Waarsêery, nè?” sê die bestuurder terwyl hy sy handskoene afstroop en vir Harry na die agterkant van die winkel lei, waar 'n hele hoek aan fortuinvertellery gewy is. 'n Klein tafeltjie is opgestapel met volumes soos *Voorspel die Onvoorspelbare: Beskerm Jouself teen Skokke en Gebreekte Balle: Wanneer die Geluk teen jou draai*.

“Hierso,” sê die bestuurder wat op 'n trappie geklim het om 'n dik boek wat in swart gebind is, af te haal. “*Ontnewel die Toekoms*. Baie goeie gids vir al jou basiese fortuin-verteltegnieke — handlesery, kristalballes, voëlbinnegoed . . .”

Harry luister egter nie. Sy oë het op 'n ander boek geval wat op 'n klein tafeltjie staan: *Doodsbodes: Wat om te doen as jy weet dat die Ergste gaan gebeur.*

"O, ek sal dit nie lees as ek jy is nie," sê die assistent ligtelik toe hy opkyk om te sien waarna Harry staar. "Jy sal doodsbodes die wêreld volbegin sien; dis genoeg om enigiemand die skrik op die lyf te jaag."

Harry kyk egter steeds na die voorblad van die boek; dit wys 'n swart hond so groot soos 'n beer, en met glimmende oë. Hy lyk vaagweg bekend...

Die assistent druk *Ontnewel die Toekoms* in Harry se hande.

"Nog iets?" vra hy.

"Ja," sê Harry en skeur sy oë van die hond af weg. Hy bekyk sy boeketjies, ietwat verdwaas. "H'm – ek moet *Intermediêre Transfigurasië* hê en *Die Standaardhandleiding vir Goëlery, Graad Drie.*"

Toe Harry tien minute later met sy nuwe boeke onder sy arms by Sierskrif en Klatt uitstap terug na Die Kokende Pot toe, kyk hy skaars waar hy loop en bots teen verskeie mense.

Hy strompel die trappe op na sy kamer, gaan in en gooi die boeke op sy bed neer. Iemand het sy kamer aan kant gemaak; die vensters is oop en die son skyn in. Harry kan die busse in die Moggelstraat agter hom hoor verhyrammel, en ook die geraas van die onsigbare skare onder in Diagonaalstraat. Hy vang 'n glimp van homself in die spieël bo die wasbak.

"Dit kan nie 'n doodsbode wees nie," sê hy uitdagend aan sy weerkaatsing. "Ek was paniekbevange toe ek daardie ding in Magnoliasingel gesien het. Dit was waarskynlik net 'n rondloperhond..."

Hy lig sy hand meganies en probeer om sy hare plat te druk.

"Dis 'n verlore stryd, skat," sê sy spieël in 'n hees stem.

Soos die dae verbygaan, begin Harry oral rondkyk vir 'n teken van Ron of Hermien. Die kwartaal moet eersdaags begin en heelwat van Hogwarts se studente kom nou in Diagonaalstraat aan. Harry loop sy mede-Griffindors, Septimus Floris en Dean Thomas, in Kwaliteit Kwiddiek-toebehoore raak, waar ook hulle begerig na die Vuurslag staan; net buite Sierskrif en Klatt loop hy vas in die regte Neville Loggerenberg, 'n vergeetagtige rondgesigseun. Harry gaan nie staan om te gesels nie; dit lyk of Neville sy boekelys verloor het, en hy word deur sy baie formidabele ouma berispe. Harry hoop sy sal nooit uitvind dat hy gemaak het of hy Neville is toe hy vir die Ministerie vir Towerkuns weggehardloop het nie.

Harry word op die laaste dag van die vakansie wakker met die wete dat hy Ron en Hermien ten minste die volgende dag op die Hogwarts Express sal raakloop. Hy staan op, trek aan, gaan kyk vir oulaas na die Vuurslag, en wonder net waar hy middagete gaan eet, toe iemand sy naam uitroep en hy omdraai.

“Harry! HARRY!”

Daar is hulle, albei van hulle, net buite Fritz Friesmann se Roomyspaleis; Ron het meer sproete as gewoonlik, Hermien is baie bruin, en albei waai uitgelate vir hom.

“Uiteindelik!” sê Ron en hy grinnik vir Harry toe hy gaan sit. “Ons was by Die Kokende Pot, maar hulle het gesê jy’s reeds weg, en toe’s ons na Sierskrif en Klatt, en na Madame Malkin, en –”

“Ek het my skoolgoed al verlede week gekoop,” verduidelik Harry. “En hoe het julle geweet dat ek by Die Kokende Pot bly?”

“Pa,” sê Ron eenvoudig.

Mnr. Weasley werk by die Ministerie vir Towerkuns en sou die hele storie van wat met tant Marge gebeur het, beslis gehoor het.

“Het jy regtig jou tante opgeblaas, Harry?” vra Hermien in ’n baie ernstige stem.

“Ek het dit nie bedoel nie,” sê Harry, terwyl Ron brul van die lag. “Ek het net – beheer verloor.”

“Dis nie snaaks nie, Ron,” sê Hermien kwaai. “Regtig, ek is verbaas dat Harry nie geskors is nie.”

“Ek ook,” erken Harry. “Vergeet van skors, ek dag ek gaan gearresteer word.” Hy kyk na Ron. “Jou pa weet nie dalk hoekom Broddelwerk my oorgesien het nie, of weet hy?”

“Seker omdat dit jy is, wat anders?” sê Ron skouerophalend terwyl hy nog steeds grinnik. “Die beroemde Harry Potter en so aan. Ek sal liever nie wil weet wat die Ministerie vir Towerkuns met my sal maak as ek ’n tante opblaas nie. Hulle sal my egter eers moet opgrawe, want my ma sal my klaar vermoor het. In elk geval, jy kan my pa vanaand self vra. Ons bly ook vannag in Die Kokende Pot oor! Jy kan môre saam met ons King’s Cross toe gaan! Hermien gaan ook daar wees!”

Hermien knik stralend. “My ma en pa het my vanoggend met al my Hogwarts-goed afgelaai.”

“Uitstekend,” sê Harry tevrede. “Jy het dus al jou nuwe boeke en goed?”

“Kyk net hier,” sê Ron en haal ’n lang, smal dosie uit ’n sak en maak dit oop. “Splinternuwe towerstaf. Vyf-en-dertig sentimeter, wilg, met ’n enkele eenhoringsterhaar. Ons het al ons boeke ook” – hy wys na ’n groot sak onder sy stoel. “Wat sê jy van daardie Monsterboeke, hê? Die assistent het amper gehuil toe ons sê ons wil twee hê.”

“Wat is al daai goed, Hermien?” vra Harry en wys na nie een nie, maar drie bultende sakke op die stoel langs haar.

“Wel, ek neem mos meer vakke as julle, dan nie?” sê Hermien. “Daardie is my boeke vir Rekenmatiek, Versorging van Magiese Creature, Waarsêery, Die Studie van Antieke Runes, Moggelstudies –”

“Hoekom neem jy Moggelstudies?” sê Ron en hy rol sy oë vir Harry.

"Jy, dan 'n gebore Moggel! Jou ma en pa is Moggels! Jy weet mos klaar alles oor Moggels!"

"Dit sal fassinerend wees om hulle te bestudeer vanuit die towenaars se oogpunt," sê Hermien ernstig.

"Maan jy hierdie jaar ooit eet of slaap, Hermien?" vra Harry terwyl Ron onderlangs giggel. Hermien ignoreer hulle.

"Ek het nog tien Galjoene oor," sê sy terwyl sy in haar beursie vroetel. "Ek verjaar in September en my ma en pa het vir my geld gegee vir 'n vroer verjaardaggeskenk."

"Wat van 'n lekker boek?" sê Ron onskuldig.

"Nee, ek dink nie so nie," sê Hermien bedaard. "Eintlik wil ek 'n uil. Ek bedoel, Harry het vir Hedwig en jy het vir Errol –"

"Ek het nie," sê Ron. "Errol is die hele gesin se uil. Al wat ek het, is Skille." Hy haal sy troetelrot uit sy sak. "En hy moet deeglik ondersoek word," voeg hy by toe hy vir Skille op die tafel voor hulle neersit. "Ek dink nie Egipte het met hom geakkordeer nie."

Skille lyk maerder as gewoonlik en sy snorbaarde hang merkbaar.

"Daar is 'n Magiese Kreature-winkel daar anderkant," sê Harry, wat Diagonaalstraat teen hierdie tyd baie goed ken. "Jy kan kyk of hulle iets vir Skille het, en Hermien kan haar uil kry."

Hulle betaal vir hul roomyse en stap oor die straat na die Magiese Kreature-winkel.

Dit is beknop daar binne. Elke stukkie muur is toe onder hokke. Dit ruik sleg en dit is baie raserig, want al die inwoners van die hokke piep, krys, babbel of sis. Die heks agter die toonbank is besig om 'n towenaar raad te gee oor die versorging van dubbelbek-watersalamanders, dus bekyk Harry, Ron en Hermien die hokke terwyl hulle wag.

'n Paar enorme pers skurwepaddas sit hulself natterig en versluk aan 'n fees van dooie brommers. 'n Reuseskilpad waarvan die dop ryklik met juwele versier is, skitter digby die venster. Giftige oranje slakke seil stadig en slymerig op teen die kant van hul glastenk, en 'n vet wit konyn is die hele tyd besig om met 'n harde plofgeluid in 'n sykeil en weer terug te verander. Dan is daar katte in alle kleure, 'n raserige kou vol rawe, 'n mandjie met snaakse vlakleurige pelsballetjies wat luidkeels neurie, en op die toonbank, 'n tamaai hok vol blinkswart rotte wat die een of ander touspringspeletjie met hul lang, kaal sterte speel.

Die towenaar met die dubbelbek-watersalamanders is klaar en loop, en Ron stap na die toonbank toe.

"Dis my rot," sê hy vir die heks. "Vandat ons terug is uit Egipte is hy nie op sy stukke nie."

"Sit hom op die toonbank neer," sê die heks en haal 'n swart dikraambril uit haar sak.

Ron haal vir Skille uit sy binnesak en sit hom langs die hok vol rotte

neer, wat hul touspring-toertjies staak en na die draad skarrel om beter te kan sien.

Soos amper alles wat Ron besit, is Skille die rot tweedehands (hy het vroeër aan Ron se broer Percy behoort) en ietwat gehawend. Naas die blink rotte in die hok lyk hy besonder triestig.

"H'm," sê die heks toe sy vir Skille optel. "Hoe oud is hierdie rot?"

"Weet nie," sê Ron. "Nogal oud. Hy was eers my broer s'n."

"Watter magte het hy?" vra die heks en bekyk vir Skille van naderby.

"He –" sê Ron. Die waarheid is dat Skille nog nooit die geringste teken gegee het dat hy oor interessante magte beskik nie. Die heks se oë dwaal van Skille se toingrige linkeroor na sy voorpoot wat een toon te min het, en sy klik haar tong hard.

"Hy's al deur diep water, hierdie een," sê sy.

"Hy was so toe Percy hom vir my gegee het," sê Ron op die verdediging.

"'n Gewone tuin- of huisrot soos dié kan nie verwag om ouer as so drie jaar te word nie," sê die heks. "As jy iets soek wat meer duursaam is, sal jy dalk van een van hierdie hou . . ."

Sy wys na die swart rotte wat dadelik weer begin touspring het, en Ron mompel, "Windgatte."

"Wel, as jy nie jou rot wil vervang nie, kan jy hierdie Rot-tonikum probeer," sê die heks terwyl sy haar hand onder die toonbank insteek en 'n klein rooi botteltjie uithaal.

"Goed," sê Ron. "Hoeveel kos dit – EINA!"

Ron krimp inmekaar toe iets wat groot en oranje is bo van die hoogste hok afspring, op sy kop land en met 'n wilde gespoeg op Skille afpyl.

"NEE, KROMSKEEN, NEE!" gil die heks, maar Skille skiet soos 'n koekie seep deur haar hande, land wydsbeen oopgespalk op die vloer en skarrel deur toe.

"Skille!" gil Ron en haas hom uit die winkel agter die rot aan, met Harry agterna.

Dit neem hulle 'n goeie tien minute voor hulle vir Skille kry, waar hy onder 'n vullisdrom net buite Kwaliteit Kwiddiek-toebehore wegkruip. Ron prop die bewende rot terug in sy sak en kom orent terwyl hy sy kop vryf.

"Wat was dit?"

"Dit was óf 'n baie groot kat, óf 'n kleinerige tier," sê Harry.

"Waar's Hermien?"

"Koop seker haar uil."

Hulle beweeg deur die vol straat na die Magiese Kreature-winkel. Toe hulle daar kom, kom Hermien net uit, maar sy het nie 'n uil by haar nie. Sy hou die enorme gemmerkat styf in haar arms vas.

"Het jy daardie monster gekoop?" sê Ron en sy mond hang oop.

"Is hy nie pragtig nie?" sê Hermien stralend.

Dit hang seker af hoe jy dit beskou, dink Harry. Die kat se gemmerpels is dik en wollerig, maar hy het beslis effense bakbene en die gesig lyk knorrig en ingedruk soos iets wat kop eerste in 'n baksteenmuur vasgehardloop het. Noudat Skille egter buite sig is, sit die kat rustig in Hermien se arms en spin.

"Hermien, daardie ding het my kopvel amper afgeskil!" sê Ron.

"Dit was nie aspris nie, nè, Kromskeen?" sê Hermien.

"En wat van Skille?" sê Ron en hy wys na die bult in sy hemsak. "Hy moet rus en kalmte om hom hê! Hoe gaan hy dit regkry met daardie ding in die rondte?"

"Dit herinner my, jy't jou Rot-tonikum vergeet," sê Hermien en druk die klein rooi botteltjie in Ron se hand. "En hou op om jou so te bekommer, Kromskeen sal in my slaapsaal wees en Skille in julle s'n. Is dit so moeilik? Arme Kromskeen, daardie heks sê hy's al jare daar: niemand wil hom hê nie."

"Ek wonder hoekom," sê Ron sarkasties toe hulle afsit na Die Kokende Pot toe.

Hulle kry mnr. Weasley waar hy in die kroeg sit en die *Daaglikse Prophet* lees.

"Harry!" sê hy glimlaggend toe hy opkyk. "Hoe gaan dit?"

"Goed dankie," sê Harry toe hy, Ron en Hermien en al hul inkopies by mnr. Weasley aansluit.

Mnr. Weasley sit die koerant neer, en Harry sien die nou reeds bekende gesig van Sirius Swardt wat na hom staan.

"Hulle het hom nog steeds nie gevang nie?" vra hy.

"Nee," sê mnr. Weasley en hy lyk besonder ernstig. "Hulle het ons almal by ons gewone poste in die Ministerie weggeneem om te help soek, maar tot dusver nog sonder enige sukses."

"Sal ons 'n beloning kry as ons hom vang?" vra Ron. "Dit sal lekker wees om nog geld –"

"Moenie stuitig wees nie, Ron," sê mnr. Weasley, wat van naderby beskou baie gespanne lyk. "Swardt sal nie deur 'n dertienjarige towenaar vasgetrek word nie. Dis die wagte by Azkaban wat hom sal kry, hoor maar wat ek sê."

Op hierdie oomblik kom mev. Weasley die kroeg binne, gelaai met inkopies en gevolg deur die tweeling, Fred en George, wat hul vyfde jaar in Hoggwarts gaan begin, die pas verkose Hoofseun, Percy, en die Weasleys se jongste kind en enigste dogter, Ginny.

Ginny, wat nog altyd baie van Harry hou, lyk nog skamer as gewoonlik toe sy hom sien, dalk omdat hy tydens hul laaste kwartaal in Hoggwarts haar lewe gered het. Sy word baie rooi en mompel "hallo" sonder om na hom te kyk. Percy hou egter sy hand plegtig uit asof hy nog nooit vir Harry ontmoet het nie en sê, "Harry. Dis gaaf om jou te sien."

"Hallo, Percy," sê Harry en doen sy bes om nie te lag nie.

"Ek hoop dit gaan goed met jou," sê Percy hoogdrawend terwyl hy hand skud. Dit is amper soos om aan die burgemeester voorgestel te word.

"Baie goed, dankie –"

"Harry!" sê Fred en stamp vir Percy met sy elmboog opsy en buig laag.

"Dis werklik 'n voorreg om jou te sien –"

"Wonderlik," sê George terwyl hy vir Fred eenkant toe stoot en Harry se hand op sy beurt gryp. "Absoluut uitstekend."

Percy trek 'n suur gesig.

"Dis nou genoeg," sê mev. Weasley.

"Moeder!" sê Fred, asof hy haar so pas vir die eerste keer gesien het, en hy gryp ook haar hand vas. "Dis werklik voortreflik om u hier raak te loop –"

"Ek het gesê dit is genoeg," sê mev. Weasley en plak haar inkopies op 'n leë stoel neer. "Hallo, Harry, my kind. Jy het seker ons opwindende nuus gehoor?" Sy wys na die splinternuwe silwer lapelwapen op Percy se bors. "Tweede Hoofseun in die gesin!" sê sy en sy swel van trots.

"En laaste," mompel Fred onderlangs.

"Daaroor het ek geen bedenkinge nie," sê mev. Weasley en frons skielik. "Ek sien dat julle twee nie prefekte is nie."

"Hoekom sal ons prefekte wil wees?" sê George en hy lyk gewalg deur die idee. "Dit sal al die pret uit die lewe haal."

Ginny giggel.

"Julle behoort 'n beter voorbeeld vir jul suster te stel!" sê mev. Weasley kwaai.

"Ginny het ander broers wat vir haar 'n voorbeeld kan wees, Moeder," sê Percy uit die hoogte. "Ek gaan kamer toe om vir aandete te gaan verkleë . . ."

Hy verdwyn, en George sug swaar.

"Ons het probeer om hom in 'n piramide toe te sluit," sê hy vir Harry, "maar Ma het ons gesien."

Aandete dié aand is 'n gesellige geleentheid. Tom die herbergier stoot drie tafels in die voorkamer teen mekaar en die sewe Weasleys, Harry en Hermien eet hulle knuppeldik aan 'n heerlike vyfgangmaal.

"Hoe kom ons môre by King's Cross, Pa?" vra Fred terwyl hulle aan 'n smaaklike sjokoladepoeding smul.

"Die Ministerie gaan 'n paar motors verskaf," sê mnr. Weasley. Almal kyk na hom.

"Hoekom?" vra Percy nuuskierig.

"Dis oor jou, Percy," sê George ernstig. "Daar gaan klein vlaggies op die enjinkappe wees met HS daarop –"

vir Hoofsnob," sê Fred.

Almal behalwe mev. Weasley en Percy snorklag in hul poeding.

"Hoekom verskaf die Ministerie voertuie, Vader?" vra Percy in 'n waarliggende stem.

"Wel, ons het nie meer een nie," sê mnr. Weasley, "en omdat ek daar werk, doen hulle hierdie guns vir my . . ."

"Hy stem klink ongeërg, maar Harry kan nie anders nie as om te sien dat mnr. Weasley se ore rooi word, net soos Ron s'n wanneer hy stres het.

"Wat 'n genade," sê mev. Weasley flink. "Besef julle hoeveel bagasie julle het? Julle gaan omtrent koddig lyk daar op die Moggels se stasie. Het julle klaar gepak?"

"Ron het nog nie al sy nuwe goed ingepak nie," sê Percy in 'n lankmoedige stem. "Hy het alles op my bed gegooi."

"Jy moet ordentlik gaan inpak, Ron; ons het nie baie tyd in die oggend nie," roep mev. Weasley langs die tafel af. Ron kyk suur na Percy.

Na aandete is almal baie vol en vaak. Hulle gaan een na die ander op na hul kamers om alles vir die volgende dag in orde te kry. Ron en Percy is langs Harry. Hy het sy eie trommel pas toegemaak en gesluit toe hy kwaai stemme deur die muur hoor, en omstap om te kyk wat aan die gang is.

Nommer twaalf se deur is op 'n skrefie oop en Percy is besig om te skree.

"Dit was hier, op die tafeltjie langs my bed, ek het dit afgehaal om dit blink te vryf –"

"Ek het nie daaraan geraak nie, oukei!" brul Ron terug.

"Wat gaan aan?" vra Harry.

"My Hoofseun-wapen is weg," sê Percy en draai na Harry.

"Skille se Rot-tonikum ook," sê Ron terwyl hy goed uit sy trommel gooi soos hy soek. "Ek dink ek het dit dalk in die kroeg gelos –"

"Jy gaan nêrens voor jy nie my wapen gekry het nie!" gil Percy.

"Ek sal Skille se tonikum gaan haal, ek het klaar gepak," sê Harry vir Ron, en hy begin ondertoe stap.

Halfpad in die donker gang op pad kroeg toe, hoor Harry 'n tweede paar kwaai stemme wat uit die voorkamer kom. 'n Oomblik later herken hy dit as mnr. en mev. Weasley s'n. Hy aarsel. Hy wil nie hê hulle moet weet dat hy hulle hoor stry het nie, maar toe hy sy eie naam hoor, steek hy vas, en beweeg dan nader aan die voorkamer se deur.

"... dit maak geen sin om hom nie te vertel nie," sê mnr. Weasley ergerlik. "Harry het 'n reg om te weet. Ek het vir Broddelwerk probeer oortuig, maar hy dring daarop aan om Harry soos 'n kind te behandel. Hy is dertien jaar oud en –"

"Arthur, die waarheid sal hom heeltemal verskrik!" sê mev. Weasley skril. "Wil jy regtig vir Harry terug skool toe stuur met daardie vrees wat oor hom hang? Hemeltjie tog, hy's gelukkig dat hy nie weet nie!"

“Ek wil hom nie ongelukkig maak nie, ek wil hê hy moet op sy hoede wees!” kap mnr. Weasley terug. “Jy weet hoe Harry en Ron is, loop rond op hul eie – hulle was al twee keer in die Verbode Woud! Vanjaar mag Harry dit nie doen nie! As ek dink wat alles met hom kon gebeur het daardie nag toe hy van die huis weggeloop het! As die Ridderbus hom nie opgelaai het nie, wed ek jou was hy dood voor die Ministerie vir Towerkuns hom kon kry.”

“Maar hy is nie dood nie, hy makeer niks, so wat is die punt –”

“Molly, hulle sê Sirius Swardt is mal, en dalk is hy, maar hy was slim genoeg om uit Azkaban te ontsnap, en dit is veronderstel om onmoontlik te wees. Drie weke is reeds verby en daar is nog geen taal of tyding van hom nie, en ek gee nie om wat Broddelwerk vir die *Daaglikse Profeet* sê nie, ek sê ons sal outomatiese toorstawwe vervaardig voor ons vir Swardt vang. Al wat ons met sekerheid weet, is wat Swardt wil hê –”

“Maar Harry sal heeltemal veilig by Hogwarts wees.”

“Ons het gedink Azkaban is heeltemal veilig. As Swardt by Azkaban kan uitbreek, dan kan hy by Hogwarts inbreek.”

“Maar niemand is seker dat Swardt regtig agter Harry aan is –”

Daar is 'n geluid soos 'n hou op hout, en Harry is seker dat mnr. Weasley met sy vuus op die tafel geslaan het.

“Molly, hoeveel keer moet ek dit nog vir jou sê? Hulle het dit nie in die pers aangekondig nie, want Broddelwerk wil dit stil hou, maar Broddelwerk is na Azkaban die nag toe Swardt ontsnap het. Die wagte het vir hom gesê dat Swardt reeds 'n geruime tyd in sy slaap gepraat het. Altyd dieselfde woorde: ‘Hy is by Hogwarts . . . hy is by Hogwarts.’ Swardt is van sy sinne beroof, Molly, en hy wil vir Harry dood hê. Ek dink hy glo dat Jy-Weet-Wie se mag sal terugkom indien hy vir Harry kan vermoor. Swardt het alles verloor die nag toe Harry vir Jy-Weet-Wie gestuit het, en hy broei reeds vir twaalf jaar alleen in Azkaban daaroor . . .”

Daar is 'n stilte. Harry kom nader aan die deur, gretig om nog te hoor.

“Wel, Arthur, jy moet doen wat jy dink is reg. Maar jy vergeet van Albus Dompeldorius. Ek dink nie iemand kan vir Harry enige skade by Hogwarts aandoen solank Dompeldorius skoolhoof is nie. Ek veronderstel hy weet van alles?”

“Natuurlik weet hy. Ons het hom gevra of hy sal omgee as Azkaban se wagte die ingange na die skoolterrein beman. Hy was nie gelukkig daaroor nie, maar hy het tog ingestem.”

“Nie gelukkig nie? Hoekom is hy ongelukkig as hulle daar is om vir Swardt te vang?”

“Dompeldorius hou nie van Azkaban se wagte nie,” sê mnr. Weasley swaarmoedig. “Ek ook nie, om eerlik te wees . . . maar as 'n mens met 'n towenaar soos Swardt deurmekaar is, dan moet jy soms saamwerk met diegene wat jy eerder wil vermy.”

“As hulle vir Harry red –”

“– dan sê ek nooit weer ’n slegte woord oor hulle nie,” sê mnr. Weasley swikkies. “Dis laat, Molly, ons beter boontoe gaan . . .”

Harry hoor hoe die stoele skuif. So saggies as wat hy kan, haas hy hom al in die gang tot by die kroeg waar hy buite sig is. Die voorkamerdeur gaan oop, en ’n paar oomblikke later hoor hy aan die voetstappe dat mnr. en mev. Weasley die trappe klim.

Die bottel Rot-tonikum lê onder die tafel waar hulle vroeër gesit het. Harry wag tot hy mnr. en mev. Weasley se kamerdeur hoor toegaan, toe haal hy terug boontoe met die bottel.

Fred en George sit gehurk in die skaduwee op die trap en skud van die lag, terwyl hulle luister hoe Percy sy en Ron se kamer omkrap op soek na ’n wapen.

“Ons het dit,” fluister Fred vir Harry. “Ons het dit ’n bietjie verbeter.”

Die wapen lees nou *Grootneus*.

Harry dwing homself om te lag, gaan gee vir Ron sy Rot-tonikum, maak sy deur toe en gaan lê op sy bed.

Sirius Swardt is dus agter hom aan. Dit verduidelik alles. Broddelwerk was toegeeflik omdat hy so verlig was om Harry lewend te sien. Hy het Harry laat belowe om in Diagonaalstraat te bly omdat daar baie towenars is wat ’n ogie oor hom kan hou. Hy gaan twee motors van die Ministerie stuur om hulle almal die volgende dag stasie toe te neem, sodat die Weasleys Harry kan oppas tot hy op die trein is.

Harry lê en luister na die gedempte geskel langsaan en wonder hoekom hy nie banger voel nie. Sirius Swardt het dertien mense met een vloek vermoor; mnr. en mev. Weasley glo duidelik dat Harry paniekbevange sal wees as hy die waarheid moet weet. Harry stem egter ten volle met mev. Weasley saam dat die veiligste plek op aarde die plek is waar Albus Dompeldorius hom bevind. Sê almal dan nie altyd dat Dompeldorius die enigste persoon is vir wie die heer Woldemort nog ooit bang was nie? Swardt Woldemort se regterhand, moet dus net so bang vir hom wees?

Dan is daar al daardie wagte van Azkaban waarvan almal die hele tyd praat. Dit klink of hulle die meeste mense waansinnig van vrees maak, en as hulle reg om die skool ontplooi word, moet Swardt se kanse om in te kom bitter klein wees.

Nee, in die geheel gesien, is die ding wat Harry die meeste pla die feit dat sy kans om na Hogsmeade te gaan, nou absoluut nul moet wees. Niemand sal wil hê dat Harry die veiligheid van die kasteel verlaat tot na Swardt gevang is nie, om die waarheid te sê, Harry vermoed dat elke beweging wat hy maak fyn dopgehou sal word tot die gevaar verby is.

Hy trek skeweбек vir die donker plafon. Dink hulle hy kan nie na homself kyk nie? Hy het reeds drie keer van die heer Woldemort af weggekom, dis nie of hy heeltemal hulpeloos is nie . . .

Die beeld van die ondier in die skaduwees in Magnoliasingel doem
ongevraag voor hom op. Wat om te doen as jy weet dat die Ergste gaan
gebeur.

“Ek gaan nie vermoor word nie,” sê Harry hardop.

“Dis die gees, skat,” sê sy spieël slaperig.

CHAPTER FIVE



THE DEMENTOR

Tom woke Harry the next morning with his usual toothless grin and a cup of tea. Harry got dressed and was just persuading a disgruntled Hedwig to get back into her cage when Ron banged his way into the room, pulling a sweatshirt over his head and looking irritable.

“The sooner we get on the train, the better,” he said. “At least I can get away from Percy at Hogwarts. Now he’s accusing me of dripping tea on his photo of Penelope Clearwater. You know,” Ron grimaced, “his *girlfriend*. She’s hidden her face under the frame because her nose has gone all blotchy. . . .”

"I've got something to tell you," Harry began, but they were interrupted by Fred and George, who had looked in to congratulate Ron on infuriating Percy again.

They headed down to breakfast, where Mr. Weasley was reading the front page of the *Daily Prophet* with a furrowed brow and Mrs. Weasley was telling Hermione and Ginny about a love potion she'd made as a young girl. All three of them were rather giggly.

"What were you saying?" Ron asked Harry as they sat down.

"Later," Harry muttered as Percy stormed in.

Harry had no chance to speak to Ron or Hermione in the chaos of leaving; they were too busy heaving all their trunks down the Leaky Cauldron's narrow staircase and piling them up near the door, with Hedwig and Hermes, Percy's screech owl, perched on top in their cages. A small wickerwork basket stood beside the heap of trunks, spitting loudly.

"It's all right, Crookshanks," Hermione cooed through the wickerwork. "I'll let you out on the train."

"You won't," snapped Ron. "What about poor Scabbers, eh?"

He pointed at his chest, where a large lump indicated that Scabbers was curled up in his pocket.

Mr. Weasley, who had been outside waiting for the Ministry cars, stuck his head inside.

"They're here," he said. "Harry, come on."

Mr. Weasley marched Harry across the short stretch of pavement toward the first of two old-fashioned dark green cars, each of which was driven by a furtive-looking wizard wearing a suit of emerald velvet.

“In you get, Harry,” said Mr. Weasley, glancing up and down the crowded street.

Harry got into the back of the car and was shortly joined by Hermione, Ron, and, to Ron’s disgust, Percy.

The journey to King’s Cross was very uneventful compared with Harry’s trip on the Knight Bus. The Ministry of Magic cars seemed almost ordinary, though Harry noticed that they could slide through gaps that Uncle Vernon’s new company car certainly couldn’t have managed. They reached King’s Cross with twenty minutes to spare; the Ministry drivers found them trolleys, unloaded their trunks, touched their hats in salute to Mr. Weasley, and drove away, somehow managing to jump to the head of an unmoving line at the traffic lights.

Mr. Weasley kept close to Harry’s elbow all the way into the station.

“Right then,” he said, glancing around them. “Let’s do this in pairs, as there are so many of us. I’ll go through first with Harry.”

Mr. Weasley strolled toward the barrier between platforms nine and ten, pushing Harry’s trolley and apparently very interested in the InterCity 125 that had just arrived at platform nine. With a meaningful look at Harry, he leaned casually against the barrier. Harry imitated him.

In a moment, they had fallen sideways through the solid metal onto platform nine and three-quarters and looked up to see the Hogwarts Express, a scarlet steam engine, puffing smoke over a platform packed with witches and wizards seeing their children onto the train.

Percy and Ginny suddenly appeared behind Harry. They were

panting and had apparently taken the barrier at a run.

“Ah, there’s Penelope!” said Percy, smoothing his hair and going pink again. Ginny caught Harry’s eye, and they both turned away to hide their laughter as Percy strode over to a girl with long, curly hair, walking with his chest thrown out so that she couldn’t miss his shiny badge.

Once the remaining Weasleys and Hermione had joined them, Harry and Ron led the way to the end of the train, past packed compartments, to a carriage that looked quite empty. They loaded the trunks onto it, stowed Hedwig and Crookshanks in the luggage rack, then went back outside to say good-bye to Mr. and Mrs. Weasley.

Mrs. Weasley kissed all her children, then Hermione, and finally, Harry. He was embarrassed, but really quite pleased, when she gave him an extra hug.

“Do take care, won’t you, Harry?” she said as she straightened up, her eyes oddly bright. Then she opened her enormous handbag and said, “I’ve made you all sandwiches. . . . Here you are, Ron. . . . no, they’re not corned beef. . . . Fred? Where’s Fred? Here you are, dear. . . .”

“Harry,” said Mr. Weasley quietly, “come over here a moment.”

He jerked his head toward a pillar, and Harry followed him behind it, leaving the others crowded around Mrs. Weasley.

“There’s something I’ve got to tell you before you leave —” said Mr. Weasley, in a tense voice.

“It’s all right, Mr. Weasley,” said Harry. “I already know.”

“You know? How could you know?”

“I — er — I heard you and Mrs. Weasley talking last night. I

couldn't help hearing," Harry added quickly. "Sorry —"

"That's not the way I'd have chosen for you to find out," said Mr. Weasley, looking anxious.

"No — honestly, it's okay. This way, you haven't broken your word to Fudge and I know what's going on."

"Harry, you must be very scared —"

"I'm not," said Harry sincerely. "*Really*," he added, because Mr. Weasley was looking disbelieving. "I'm not trying to be a hero, but seriously, Sirius Black can't be worse than Voldemort, can he?"

Mr. Weasley flinched at the sound of the name but overlooked it.

"Harry, I knew you were, well, made of stronger stuff than Fudge seems to think, and I'm obviously pleased that you're not scared, but —"

"Arthur!" called Mrs. Weasley, who was now shepherding the rest onto the train. "Arthur, what are you doing? It's about to go!"

"He's coming, Molly!" said Mr. Weasley, but he turned back to Harry and kept talking in a lower and more hurried voice. "Listen, I want you to give me your word —"

"— that I'll be a good boy and stay in the castle?" said Harry gloomily.

"Not entirely," said Mr. Weasley, who looked more serious than Harry had ever seen him. "Harry, swear to me you won't go *looking* for Black."

Harry stared. "What?"

There was a loud whistle. Guards were walking along the train, slamming all the doors shut.

"Promise me, Harry," said Mr. Weasley, talking more quickly still,

“that whatever happens —”

“Why would I go looking for someone I know wants to kill me?” said Harry blankly.

“Swear to me that whatever you might hear —”

“Arthur, quickly!” cried Mrs. Weasley.

Steam was billowing from the train; it had started to move. Harry ran to the compartment door and Ron threw it open and stood back to let him on. They leaned out of the window and waved at Mr. and Mrs. Weasley until the train turned a corner and blocked them from view.

“I need to talk to you in private,” Harry muttered to Ron and Hermione as the train picked up speed.

“Go away, Ginny,” said Ron.

“Oh, that’s nice,” said Ginny huffily, and she stalked off.

Harry, Ron, and Hermione set off down the corridor, looking for an empty compartment, but all were full except for the one at the very end of the train.

This had only one occupant, a man sitting fast asleep next to the window. Harry, Ron, and Hermione checked on the threshold. The Hogwarts Express was usually reserved for students and they had never seen an adult there before, except for the witch who pushed the food cart.

The stranger was wearing an extremely shabby set of wizard’s robes that had been darned in several places. He looked ill and exhausted. Though quite young, his light brown hair was flecked with gray.

“Who d’you reckon he is?” Ron hissed as they sat down and slid

the door shut, taking the seats farthest away from the window.

“Professor R. J. Lupin,” whispered Hermione at once.

“How d’you know that?”

“It’s on his case,” she replied, pointing at the luggage rack over the man’s head, where there was a small, battered case held together with a large quantity of neatly knotted string. The name *Professor R. J. Lupin* was stamped across one corner in peeling letters.

“Wonder what he teaches?” said Ron, frowning at Professor Lupin’s pallid profile.

“That’s obvious,” whispered Hermione. “There’s only one vacancy, isn’t there? Defense Against the Dark Arts.”

Harry, Ron, and Hermione had already had two Defense Against the Dark Arts teachers, both of whom had lasted only one year. There were rumors that the job was jinxed.

“Well, I hope he’s up to it,” said Ron doubtfully. “He looks like one good hex would finish him off, doesn’t he? Anyway . . .” He turned to Harry. “What were you going to tell us?”

Harry explained all about Mr. and Mrs. Weasley’s argument and the warning Mr. Weasley had just given him. When he’d finished, Ron looked thunderstruck, and Hermione had her hands over her mouth. She finally lowered them to say, “Sirius Black escaped to come after *you*? Oh, Harry . . . you’ll have to be really, really careful. Don’t go looking for trouble, Harry —”

“I don’t go looking for trouble,” said Harry, nettled. “Trouble usually finds *me*.”

“How thick would Harry have to be, to go looking for a nutter who wants to kill him?” said Ron shakily.

They were taking the news worse than Harry had expected. Both Ron and Hermione seemed to be much more frightened of Black than he was.

“No one knows how he got out of Azkaban,” said Ron uncomfortably. “No one’s ever done it before. And he was a top-security prisoner too.”

“But they’ll catch him, won’t they?” said Hermione earnestly. “I mean, they’ve got all the Muggles looking out for him too. . . .”

“What’s that noise?” said Ron suddenly.

A faint, tinny sort of whistle was coming from somewhere. They looked all around the compartment.

“It’s coming from your trunk, Harry,” said Ron, standing up and reaching into the luggage rack. A moment later he had pulled the Pocket Sneakoscope out from between Harry’s robes. It was spinning very fast in the palm of Ron’s hand and glowing brilliantly.

“Is that a *Sneakoscope*?” said Hermione interestedly, standing up for a better look.

“Yeah . . . mind you, it’s a very cheap one,” Ron said. “It went haywire just as I was tying it to Errol’s leg to send it to Harry.”

“Were you doing anything untrustworthy at the time?” said Hermione shrewdly.

“No! Well . . . I wasn’t supposed to be using Errol. You know he’s not really up to long journeys . . . but how else was I supposed to get Harry’s present to him?”

“Stick it back in the trunk,” Harry advised as the Sneakoscope whistled piercingly, “or it’ll wake him up.”

He nodded toward Professor Lupin. Ron stuffed the Sneakoscope

into a particularly horrible pair of Uncle Vernon's old socks, which deadened the sound, then closed the lid of the trunk on it.

"We could get it checked in Hogsmeade," said Ron, sitting back down. "They sell that sort of thing in Dervish and Banges, magical instruments and stuff. Fred and George told me."

"Do you know much about Hogsmeade?" asked Hermione keenly. "I've read it's the only entirely non-Muggle settlement in Britain —"

"Yeah, I think it is," said Ron in an offhand sort of way, "but that's not why I want to go. I just want to get inside Honeydukes!"

"What's that?" said Hermione.

"It's this sweetshop," said Ron, a dreamy look coming over his face, "where they've got *everything*. Pepper Imps — they make you smoke at the mouth — and great fat Chocoballs full of strawberry mousse and clotted cream, and really excellent sugar quills, which you can suck in class and just look like you're thinking what to write next —"

"But Hogsmeade's a very interesting place, isn't it?" Hermione pressed on eagerly. "In *Sites of Historical Sorcery* it says the inn was the headquarters for the 1612 goblin rebellion, and the Shrieking Shack's supposed to be the most severely haunted building in Britain —"

"— and massive sherbet balls that make you levitate a few inches off the ground while you're sucking them," said Ron, who was plainly not listening to a word Hermione was saying.

Hermione looked around at Harry.

"Won't it be nice to get out of school for a bit and explore Hogsmeade?"

“Spect it will,” said Harry heavily. “You’ll have to tell me when you’ve found out.”

“What d’you mean?” said Ron.

“I can’t go. The Dursleys didn’t sign my permission form, and Fudge wouldn’t either.”

Ron looked horrified.

“*You’re not allowed to come?* But — no way — McGonagall or someone will give you permission —”

Harry gave a hollow laugh. Professor McGonagall, head of Gryffindor House, was very strict.

“— or we can ask Fred and George, they know every secret passage out of the castle —”

“Ron!” said Hermione sharply. “I don’t think Harry should be sneaking out of school with Black on the loose —”

“Yeah, I expect that’s what McGonagall will say when I ask for permission,” said Harry bitterly.

“But if *we’re* with him,” said Ron spiritedly to Hermione, “Black wouldn’t dare —”

“Oh, Ron, don’t talk rubbish,” snapped Hermione. “Black’s already murdered a whole bunch of people in the middle of a crowded street. Do you really think he’s going to worry about attacking Harry just because *we’re* there?”

She was fumbling with the straps of Crookshanks’s basket as she spoke.

“Don’t let that thing out!” Ron said, but too late; Crookshanks leapt lightly from the basket, stretched, yawned, and sprang onto Ron’s knees; the lump in Ron’s pocket trembled and he shoved Crookshanks

angrily away.

“Get out of here!”

“Ron, don’t!” said Hermione angrily.

Ron was about to answer back when Professor Lupin stirred. They watched him apprehensively, but he simply turned his head the other way, mouth slightly open, and slept on.

The Hogwarts Express moved steadily north and the scenery outside the window became wilder and darker while the clouds overhead thickened. People were chasing backward and forward past the door of their compartment. Crookshanks had now settled in an empty seat, his squashed face turned toward Ron, his yellow eyes on Ron’s top pocket.

At one o’clock, the plump witch with the food cart arrived at the compartment door.

“D’you think we should wake him up?” Ron asked awkwardly, nodding toward Professor Lupin. “He looks like he could do with some food.”

Hermione approached Professor Lupin cautiously.

“Er — Professor?” she said. “Excuse me — Professor?”

He didn’t move.

“Don’t worry, dear,” said the witch as she handed Harry a large stack of Cauldron Cakes. “If he’s hungry when he wakes, I’ll be up front with the driver.”

“I suppose he *is* asleep?” said Ron quietly as the witch slid the compartment door closed. “I mean — he hasn’t died, has he?”

“No, no, he’s breathing,” whispered Hermione, taking the Cauldron Cake Harry passed her.

He might not be very good company, but Professor Lupin's presence in their compartment had its uses. Mid-afternoon, just as it had started to rain, blurring the rolling hills outside the window, they heard footsteps in the corridor again, and their three least favorite people appeared at the door: Draco Malfoy, flanked by his cronies, Vincent Crabbe and Gregory Goyle.

Draco Malfoy and Harry had been enemies ever since they had met on their very first train journey to Hogwarts. Malfoy, who had a pale, pointed, sneering face, was in Slytherin House; he played Seeker on the Slytherin Quidditch team, the same position that Harry played on the Gryffindor team. Crabbe and Goyle seemed to exist to do Malfoy's bidding. They were both wide and musclely; Crabbe was taller, with a pudding-bowl haircut and a very thick neck; Goyle had short, bristly hair and long, gorilla-ish arms.

"Well, look who it is," said Malfoy in his usual lazy drawl, pulling open the compartment door. "Potty and the Weasel."

Crabbe and Goyle chuckled trollishly.

"I heard your father finally got his hands on some gold this summer, Weasley," said Malfoy. "Did your mother die of shock?"

Ron stood up so quickly he knocked Crookshanks's basket to the floor. Professor Lupin gave a snort.

"Who's that?" said Malfoy, taking an automatic step backward as he spotted Lupin.

"New teacher," said Harry, who got to his feet, too, in case he needed to hold Ron back. "What were you saying, Malfoy?"

Malfoy's pale eyes narrowed; he wasn't fool enough to pick a fight right under a teacher's nose.

“C’mon,” he muttered resentfully to Crabbe and Goyle, and they disappeared.

Harry and Ron sat down again, Ron massaging his knuckles.

“I’m not going to take any crap from Malfoy this year,” he said angrily. “I mean it. If he makes one more crack about my family, I’m going to get hold of his head and —”

Ron made a violent gesture in midair.

“Ron,” hissed Hermione, pointing at Professor Lupin, “be *careful* . . .”

But Professor Lupin was still fast asleep.

The rain thickened as the train sped yet farther north; the windows were now a solid, shimmering gray, which gradually darkened until lanterns flickered into life all along the corridors and over the luggage racks. The train rattled, the rain hammered, the wind roared, but still, Professor Lupin slept.

“We must be nearly there,” said Ron, leaning forward to look past Professor Lupin at the now completely black window.

The words had hardly left him when the train started to slow down.

“Great,” said Ron, getting up and walking carefully past Professor Lupin to try and see outside. “I’m starving. I want to get to the feast . . .”

“We can’t be there yet,” said Hermione, checking her watch.

“So why’re we stopping?”

The train was getting slower and slower. As the noise of the pistons fell away, the wind and rain sounded louder than ever against the windows.

Harry, who was nearest the door, got up to look into the corridor. All along the carriage, heads were sticking curiously out of their compartments.

The train came to a stop with a jolt, and distant thuds and bangs told them that luggage had fallen out of the racks. Then, without warning, all the lamps went out and they were plunged into total darkness.

“What’s going on?” said Ron’s voice from behind Harry.

“Ouch!” gasped Hermione. “Ron, that was my foot!”

Harry felt his way back to his seat.

“D’you think we’ve broken down?”

“Dunno . . .”

There was a squeaking sound, and Harry saw the dim black outline of Ron, wiping a patch clean on the window and peering out.

“There’s something moving out there,” Ron said. “I think people are coming aboard. . . .”

The compartment door suddenly opened and someone fell painfully over Harry’s legs.

“Sorry — d’you know what’s going on? — Ouch — sorry —”

“Hullo, Neville,” said Harry, feeling around in the dark and pulling Neville up by his cloak.

“Harry? Is that you? What’s happening?”

“No idea — sit down —”

There was a loud hissing and a yelp of pain; Neville had tried to sit on Crookshanks.

“I’m going to go and ask the driver what’s going on,” came

Hermione's voice. Harry felt her pass him, heard the door slide open again, and then a thud and two loud squeals of pain.

"Who's that?"

"Who's *that*?"

"Ginny?"

"Hermione?"

"What are you doing?"

"I was looking for Ron—"

"Come in and sit down—"

"Not here!" said Harry hurriedly. "*I'm* here!"

"Ouch!" said Neville.

"Quiet!" said a hoarse voice suddenly.

Professor Lupin appeared to have woken up at last. Harry could hear movements in his corner. None of them spoke.

There was a soft, crackling noise, and a shivering light filled the compartment. Professor Lupin appeared to be holding a handful of flames. They illuminated his tired, gray face, but his eyes looked alert and wary.

"Stay where you are," he said in the same hoarse voice, and he got slowly to his feet with his handful of fire held out in front of him.

But the door slid slowly open before Lupin could reach it.

Standing in the doorway, illuminated by the shivering flames in Lupin's hand, was a cloaked figure that towered to the ceiling. Its face was completely hidden beneath its hood. Harry's eyes darted downward, and what he saw made his stomach contract. There was a hand protruding from the cloak and it was glistening, grayish, slimy-

looking, and scabbed, like something dead that had decayed in water. . . .

But it was visible only for a split second. As though the creature beneath the cloak sensed Harry's gaze, the hand was suddenly withdrawn into the folds of its black cloak.

And then the thing beneath the hood, whatever it was, drew a long, slow, rattling breath, as though it were trying to suck something more than air from its surroundings.

An intense cold swept over them all. Harry felt his own breath catch in his chest. The cold went deeper than his skin. It was inside his chest, it was inside his very heart. . . .

Harry's eyes rolled up into his head. He couldn't see. He was drowning in cold. There was a rushing in his ears as though of water. He was being dragged downward, the roaring growing louder. . . .

And then, from far away, he heard screaming, terrible, terrified, pleading screams. He wanted to help whoever it was, he tried to move his arms, but couldn't. . . . a thick white fog was swirling around him, inside him —

“Harry! Harry! Are you all right?”

Someone was slapping his face.

“W-what?”

Harry opened his eyes; there were lanterns above him, and the floor was shaking — the Hogwarts Express was moving again and the lights had come back on. He seemed to have slid out of his seat onto the floor. Ron and Hermione were kneeling next to him, and above them he could see Neville and Professor Lupin watching. Harry felt very sick, when he put up his hand to push his glasses back

on, he felt cold sweat on his face.

Ron and Hermione heaved him back onto his seat.

“Are you okay?” Ron asked nervously.

“Yeah,” said Harry, looking quickly toward the door. The hooded creature had vanished. “What happened? Where’s that — that thing? Who screamed?”

“No one screamed,” said Ron, more nervously still.

Harry looked around the bright compartment. Ginny and Neville looked back at him, both very pale.

“But I heard screaming —”

A loud snap made them all jump. Professor Lupin was breaking an enormous slab of chocolate into pieces.

“Here,” he said to Harry, handing him a particularly large piece. “Eat it. It’ll help.”

Harry took the chocolate but didn’t eat it.

“What was that thing?” he asked Lupin.

“A dementor,” said Lupin, who was now giving chocolate to everyone else. “One of the dementors of Azkaban.”

Everyone stared at him. Professor Lupin crumpled up the empty chocolate wrapper and put it in his pocket.

“Eat,” he repeated. “It’ll help. I need to speak to the driver, excuse me.”

He strolled past Harry and disappeared into the corridor.

“Are you sure you’re okay, Harry?” said Hermione, watching Harry anxiously.

“I don’t get it. . . . What happened?” said Harry, wiping more

sweat off his face.

“Well — that thing — the dementor — stood there and looked around (I mean, I think it did, I couldn’t see its face) — and you — you —”

“I thought you were having a fit or something,” said Ron, who still looked scared. “You went sort of rigid and fell out of your seat and started twitching —”

“And Professor Lupin stepped over you, and walked toward the dementor, and pulled out his wand,” said Hermione, “and he said, ‘None of us is hiding Sirius Black under our cloaks. Go.’ But the dementor didn’t move, so Lupin muttered something, and a silvery thing shot out of his wand at it, and it turned around and sort of glided away. . . .”

“It was horrible,” said Neville, in a higher voice than usual. “Did you feel how cold it got when it came in?”

“I felt weird,” said Ron, shifting his shoulders uncomfortably. “Like I’d never be cheerful again. . . .”

Ginny, who was huddled in her corner looking nearly as bad as Harry felt, gave a small sob; Hermione went over and put a comforting arm around her.

“But didn’t any of you — fall off your seats?” said Harry awkwardly.

“No,” said Ron, looking anxiously at Harry again. “Ginny was shaking like mad, though. . . .”

Harry didn’t understand. He felt weak and shivery, as though he were recovering from a bad bout of flu; he also felt the beginnings of shame. Why had he gone to pieces like that, when no one else had?

Professor Lupin had come back. He paused as he entered, looked around, and said, with a small smile, "I haven't poisoned that chocolate, you know. . . ."

Harry took a bite and to his great surprise felt warmth spread suddenly to the tips of his fingers and toes.

"We'll be at Hogwarts in ten minutes," said Professor Lupin. "Are you all right, Harry?"

Harry didn't ask how Professor Lupin knew his name.

"Fine," he muttered, embarrassed.

They didn't talk much during the remainder of the journey. At long last, the train stopped at Hogsmeade station, and there was a great scramble to get outside; owls hooted, cats meowed, and Neville's pet toad croaked loudly from under his hat. It was freezing on the tiny platform; rain was driving down in icy sheets.

"Firs' years this way!" called a familiar voice. Harry, Ron, and Hermione turned and saw the gigantic outline of Hagrid at the other end of the platform, beckoning the terrified-looking new students forward for their traditional journey across the lake.

"All righ', you three?" Hagrid yelled over the heads of the crowd. They waved at him, but had no chance to speak to him because the mass of people around them was shunting them away along the platform. Harry, Ron, and Hermione followed the rest of the school along the platform and out onto a rough mud track, where at least a hundred stagecoaches awaited the remaining students, each pulled, Harry could only assume, by an invisible horse, because when they climbed inside and shut the door, the coach set off all by itself, bumping and swaying in procession.

The coach smelled faintly of mold and straw. Harry felt better since the chocolate, but still weak. Ron and Hermione kept looking at him sideways, as though frightened he might collapse again.

As the carriage trundled toward a pair of magnificent wrought iron gates, flanked with stone columns topped with winged boars, Harry saw two more towering, hooded dementors, standing guard on either side. A wave of cold sickness threatened to engulf him again; he leaned back into the lumpy seat and closed his eyes until they had passed the gates. The carriage picked up speed on the long, sloping drive up to the castle; Hermione was leaning out of the tiny window, watching the many turrets and towers draw nearer. At last, the carriage swayed to a halt, and Hermione and Ron got out.

As Harry stepped down, a drawling, delighted voice sounded in his ear.

“You *fainted*, Potter? Is Longbottom telling the truth? You actually *fainted*?”

Malfoy elbowed past Hermione to block Harry’s way up the stone steps to the castle, his face gleeful and his pale eyes glinting maliciously.

“Shove off, Malfoy,” said Ron, whose jaw was clenched.

“Did you faint as well, Weasley?” said Malfoy loudly. “Did the scary old dementor frighten you too, Weasley?”

“Is there a problem?” said a mild voice. Professor Lupin had just gotten out of the next carriage.

Malfoy gave Professor Lupin an insolent stare, which took in the patches on his robes and the dilapidated suitcase. With a tiny hint of sarcasm in his voice, he said, “Oh, no — er — *Professor*,” then he

smirked at Crabbe and Goyle and led them up the steps into the castle.

Hermione prodded Ron in the back to make him hurry, and the three of them joined the crowd swarming up the steps, through the giant oak front doors, into the cavernous entrance hall, which was lit with flaming torches, and housed a magnificent marble staircase that led to the upper floors.

The door into the Great Hall stood open at the right; Harry followed the crowd toward it, but had barely glimpsed the enchanted ceiling, which was black and cloudy tonight, when a voice called, "Potter! Granger! I want to see you both!"

Harry and Hermione turned around, surprised. Professor McGonagall, Transfiguration teacher and head of Gryffindor House, was calling over the heads of the crowd. She was a stern-looking witch who wore her hair in a tight bun; her sharp eyes were framed with square spectacles. Harry fought his way over to her with a feeling of foreboding. Professor McGonagall had a way of making him feel he must have done something wrong.

"There's no need to look so worried — I just want a word in my office," she told them. "Move along there, Weasley."

Ron stared as Professor McGonagall ushered Harry and Hermione away from the chattering crowd; they accompanied her across the entrance hall, up the marble staircase, and along a corridor.

Once they were in her office, a small room with a large, welcoming fire, Professor McGonagall motioned Harry and Hermione to sit down. She settled herself behind her desk and said abruptly, "Professor Lupin sent an owl ahead to say that you were

taken ill on the train, Potter.”

Before Harry could reply, there was a soft knock on the door and Madam Pomfrey, the nurse, came bustling in.

Harry felt himself going red in the face. It was bad enough that he'd passed out, or whatever he had done, without everyone making all this fuss.

“I'm fine,” he said, “I don't need anything —”

“Oh, it's you, is it?” said Madam Pomfrey, ignoring this and bending down to stare closely at him. “I suppose you've been doing something dangerous again?”

“It was a dementor, Poppy,” said Professor McGonagall.

They exchanged a dark look, and Madam Pomfrey clucked disapprovingly.

“Setting dementors around a school,” she muttered, pushing back Harry's hair and feeling his forehead. “He won't be the last one who collapses. Yes, he's all clammy. Terrible things, they are, and the effect they have on people who are already delicate —”

“I'm not delicate!” said Harry crossly.

“Of course you're not,” said Madam Pomfrey absentmindedly, now taking his pulse.

“What does he need?” said Professor McGonagall crisply. “Bed rest? Should he perhaps spend tonight in the hospital wing?”

“I'm *fine*!” said Harry, jumping up. The thought of what Draco Malfoy would say if he had to go to the hospital wing was torture.

“Well, he should have some chocolate, at the very least,” said Madam Pomfrey, who was now trying to peer into Harry's eyes.

“I've already had some,” said Harry. “Professor Lupin gave me

some. He gave it to all of us.”

“Did he, now?” said Madam Pomfrey approvingly. “So we’ve finally got a Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher who knows his remedies?”

“Are you sure you feel all right, Potter?” Professor McGonagall said sharply.

“Yes,” said Harry.

“Very well. Kindly wait outside while I have a quick word with Miss Granger about her course schedule, then we can go down to the feast together.”

Harry went back into the corridor with Madam Pomfrey, who left for the hospital wing, muttering to herself. He had to wait only a few minutes; then Hermione emerged looking very happy about something, followed by Professor McGonagall, and the three of them made their way back down the marble staircase to the Great Hall.

It was a sea of pointed black hats; each of the long House tables was lined with students, their faces glimmering by the light of thousands of candles, which were floating over the tables in midair. Professor Flitwick, who was a tiny little wizard with a shock of white hair, was carrying an ancient hat and a four-legged stool out of the hall.

“Oh,” said Hermione softly, “we’ve missed the Sorting!”

New students at Hogwarts were sorted into Houses by trying on the Sorting Hat, which shouted out the House they were best suited to (Gryffindor, Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff, or Slytherin). Professor McGonagall strode off toward her empty seat at the staff table, and Harry and Hermione set off in the other direction, as quietly as

possible, toward the Gryffindor table. People looked around at them as they passed along the back of the hall, and a few of them pointed at Harry. Had the story of his collapsing in front of the dementor traveled that fast?

He and Hermione sat down on either side of Ron, who had saved them seats.

“What was all that about?” he muttered to Harry.

Harry started to explain in a whisper, but at that moment the headmaster stood up to speak, and he broke off.

Professor Dumbledore, though very old, always gave an impression of great energy. He had several feet of long silver hair and beard, half-moon spectacles, and an extremely crooked nose. He was often described as the greatest wizard of the age, but that wasn't why Harry respected him. You couldn't help trusting Albus Dumbledore, and as Harry watched him beaming around at the students, he felt really calm for the first time since the dementor had entered the train compartment.

“Welcome!” said Dumbledore, the candlelight shimmering on his beard. “Welcome to another year at Hogwarts! I have a few things to say to you all, and as one of them is very serious, I think it best to get it out of the way before you become befuddled by our excellent feast. . . .”

Dumbledore cleared his throat and continued, “As you will all be aware after their search of the Hogwarts Express, our school is presently playing host to some of the dementors of Azkaban, who are here on Ministry of Magic business.”

He paused, and Harry remembered what Mr. Weasley had said

about Dumbledore not being happy with the dementors guarding the school.

“They are stationed at every entrance to the grounds,” Dumbledore continued, “and while they are with us, I must make it plain that nobody is to leave school without permission. Dementors are not to be fooled by tricks or disguises — or even Invisibility Cloaks,” he added blandly, and Harry and Ron glanced at each other. “It is not in the nature of a dementor to understand pleading or excuses. I therefore warn each and every one of you to give them no reason to harm you. I look to the prefects, and our new Head Boy and Girl, to make sure that no student runs afoul of the dementors,” he said.

Percy, who was sitting a few seats down from Harry, puffed out his chest again and stared around impressively. Dumbledore paused again; he looked very seriously around the hall, and nobody moved or made a sound.

“On a happier note,” he continued, “I am pleased to welcome two new teachers to our ranks this year.

“First, Professor Lupin, who has kindly consented to fill the post of Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher.”

There was some scattered, rather unenthusiastic applause. Only those who had been in the compartment on the train with Professor Lupin clapped hard, Harry among them. Professor Lupin looked particularly shabby next to all the other teachers in their best robes.

“Look at Snape!” Ron hissed in Harry’s ear.

Professor Snape, the Potions master, was staring along the staff table at Professor Lupin. It was common knowledge that Snape wanted the Defense Against the Dark Arts job, but even Harry, who

hated Snape, was startled at the expression twisting his thin, sallow face. It was beyond anger. It was loathing. Harry knew that expression only too well; it was the look Snape wore every time he set eyes on Harry.

“As to our second new appointment,” Dumbledore continued as the lukewarm applause for Professor Lupin died away. “Well, I am sorry to tell you that Professor Kettleburn, our Care of Magical Creatures teacher, retired at the end of last year in order to enjoy more time with his remaining limbs. However, I am delighted to say that his place will be filled by none other than Rubeus Hagrid, who has agreed to take on this teaching job in addition to his gamekeeping duties.”

Harry, Ron, and Hermione stared at one another, stunned. Then they joined in with the applause, which was tumultuous at the Gryffindor table in particular. Harry leaned forward to see Hagrid, who was ruby-red in the face and staring down at his enormous hands, his wide grin hidden in the tangle of his black beard.

“We should’ve known!” Ron roared, pounding the table. “Who else would have assigned us a biting book?”

Harry, Ron, and Hermione were the last to stop clapping, and as Professor Dumbledore started speaking again, they saw that Hagrid was wiping his eyes on the tablecloth.

“Well, I think that’s everything of importance,” said Dumbledore. “Let the feast begin!”

The golden plates and goblets before them filled suddenly with food and drink. Harry, suddenly ravenous, helped himself to everything he could reach and began to eat.

It was a delicious feast; the hall echoed with talk, laughter, and the clatter of knives and forks. Harry, Ron, and Hermione, however, were eager for it to finish so that they could talk to Hagrid. They knew how much being made a teacher would mean to him. Hagrid wasn't a fully qualified wizard; he had been expelled from Hogwarts in his third year for a crime he had not committed. It had been Harry, Ron, and Hermione who had cleared Hagrid's name last year.

At long last, when the last morsels of pumpkin tart had melted from the golden platters, Dumbledore gave the word that it was time for them all to go to bed, and they got their chance.

"Congratulations, Hagrid!" Hermione squealed as they reached the teachers' table.

"All down ter you three," said Hagrid, wiping his shining face on his napkin as he looked up at them. "Can' believe it . . . great man, Dumbledore . . . came straight down to me hut after Professor Kettleburn said he'd had enough. . . . It's what I always wanted. . . ."

Overcome with emotion, he buried his face in his napkin, and Professor McGonagall shooed them away.

Harry, Ron, and Hermione joined the Gryffindors streaming up the marble staircase and, very tired now, along more corridors, up more and more stairs, to the hidden entrance to Gryffindor Tower. A large portrait of a fat lady in a pink dress asked them, "Password?"

"Coming through, coming through!" Percy called from behind the crowd. "The new password's 'Fortuna Major'!"

"Oh no," said Neville Longbottom sadly. He always had trouble remembering the passwords.

Through the portrait hole and across the common room, the girls

and boys divided toward their separate staircases. Harry climbed the spiral stair with no thought in his head except how glad he was to be back. They reached their familiar, circular dormitory with its five four-poster beds, and Harry, looking around, felt he was home at last.

Die Dementor

Die volgende oggend maak Tom vir Harry wakker met sy gewone tandelose glimlag en 'n koppie tee. Harry trek aan en is net besig om 'n iese-grimmige Hedwig te oorreed om terug in haar kou te klim, toe Ron aan sy deur hamer en instap. Hy is besig om 'n sweetpaktop oor sy kop te trek, en hy lyk omgekrap.

“Hoe gouer ons op die trein kom, hoe beter,” sê hy. “Ten minste kan ek by Hogwarts van Percy af wegkom. Nou sê hy al weer dat ek tee op sy foto van Penelope Clearwater gemors het. Jy weet,” Ron grynslag, “sy meisie. Sy't haar gesig onder die raam ingedruk, want haar neus is vol muisies . . .”

“Ek het iets om vir jou te vertel,” begin Harry, maar hulle word onderbreek deur Fred en George wat inloer om vir Ron geluk te wens omdat hy weer eens vir Percy woedend gemaak het.

Hulle gaan af vir ontbyt, waar mnr. Weasley die voorblad van die *Daaglikse Profeet* met 'n frons tussen sy oë sit en lees, en mev. Weasley vir Hermien en Ginny vertel van 'n Liefdesdrankie wat sy gemaak het toe sy 'n jong meisie was. Al drie van hulle is aan die giggel.

“Wat wou jy netnou gesê het?” vra Ron vir Harry toe hulle gaan sit.

“Later,” brom Harry, net toe Percy instorm.

In die harwar wat volg terwyl hulle regmaak om te vertrek, kry Harry nie kans om met Ron of Hermien te praat nie; hulle is te besig om al hul trommels by Die Kokende Pot se smal trappe af te sleep en buite die deur op te stapel, met Hedwig en Hermes, Percy se steenuil, bo-op in hul koue. 'n Klein rottangmandjie wat langs die hoop trommels staan, is verwoed aan die spoeg.

“Alles reg, Kromskeen,” koer Hermien deur die rottangwerk. “As ons op die trein is, kan jy uitkom, hoor.”

“Jy sal nie,” kap Ron tee. “Wat van die arme Skille, hè?”

Hy wys na sy bors waar 'n groot knop duidelik wys dat Skille die rot omgekrul in sy sak lê.

Mnr. Weasley, wat buite op die Ministerie se motors staan en wag, steek sy kop binnetoe.

“Hulle is hier,” sê hy. “Kom, Harry.”

Mnr. Weasley laat Harry oor die kort stukkie sypaadjie na die eerste van twee outydse donkergroen motors loop wat elk bestuur word deur 'n towenaar wat baie geheimsinnig in 'n smaraggroen fluweelpak lyk.

“In is jy, Harry,” sê mnr. Weasley, en hy kyk op en af in die besige straat.

Harry klim agterin die motor en kort daarna sluit Hermien, Ron en, tot Ron se groot ergernis, Percy, by hom aan.

Die reis na King's Cross is sonder voorval, veral vergeleke met Harry se rit op die Ridderbus. Die Ministerie vir Towerkuns se motors lyk amper gewoon, hoewel Harry oplet dat hulle gapings kan vat waardeur oom Vernon se nuwe maatskappymotor beslis nie sal kan kom nie. Toe hulle by King's Cross kom, is hulle twintig minute vroeg; die Ministerie se bestuurders gaan haal vir hulle trollies, laai die trommels af, lig hul hoede vir mnr. Weasley en toe hulle wegry, slaag hulle op 'n onverklaarbare wyse daarin om heel voor in die ry stilstaande voertuie by die verkeerslig te beland.

Die hele ent pad, tot in die stasie, bly mnr. Weasley kort op Harry se hakke.

“Goed dan,” sê hy en kyk om hulle rond. “Kom ons doen dit twee-twee, siende dat daar so baie van ons is. Ek sal eerste deurgaans saam met Harry.”

Mnr. Weasley stap na die versperring tussen platform nege en tien terwyl hy Harry se trollie stoot en maak of hy baie belang stel in die Interstad 125 wat so pas op platform nege aangekom het. Hy kyk betekenisvol in Harry se rigting, en leun dan ongeërg teen die versperring. Harry boots hom na.

Die volgende oomblik val hulle sywaarts deur die soliede metaal tot op platform nege-en-'n-driekwart, en toe hulle opkyk, sien hulle die Hogwarts Express, 'n skarlakenrooi stoomtrein wat rook blaas oor 'n hele perron vol hekse en towenaars wat hul kinders kom afsien.

Percy en Ginny verskyn skielik agter Harry. Hulle hyg na asem en het duidelik na die versperring gehardloop.

“A, daar's Penelope!” sê Percy, en hy stryk sy hare plat en word pienk in die gesig. Ginny vang Harry se oog en hulle draai albei weg om nie te wys hoe hulle lag nie, terwyl Percy na 'n meisie met lang krulhare toe stap. Sy bors is ver uitgestoot sodat sy die skitterende lapelwapen nie moet mis kyk nie.

Nadat die res van die Weasleys en Hermien by hulle aangesluit het, loop Harry en mnr. Weasley vooruit na die end van die trein, verby vol kompartemente, tot by 'n wa wat lyk of dit leeg is. Hulle laai die trommels in, sit vir Hedwig en Kromskeen op die bagasierak neer en klim weer uit om afskeid te neem.

Mev. Weasley soen al haar kinders, toe vir Hermien, en laastens vir Harry. Hy voel ietwat verleë, maar tog ook heel in sy skik toe sy hom 'n klap dra drukkie gee.

"Kyk na jouself, hoor, Harry?" sê sy toe sy regop kom, en haar oë is vinnig blink. Daarna maak sy haar enorme handsak oop en sê, "Ek het toe broodjies vir julle almal gemaak. Hier is joune, Ron . . . nee, dis nie jou liebief nie . . . Fred? Waar is Fred? Hierso, skat . . ."

"Harry," sê mnr. Weasley onderlangs, "kom 'n bietjie hier."

Hy beduie met sy kop en Harry volg hom tot agter 'n pilaar, terwyl die res om mev. Weasley saamdrom.

"Daar is iets wat ek vir jou moet sê voor jy gaan –" sê mnr. Weasley gespanne.

"Dis alles reg, mnr. Weasley," sê Harry, "ek weet al."

"Jy weet? Hoe kan jy weet?"

"Ek – h'm – ek het gehoor toe u en mev. Weasley laas nag gepraat het. Ek kon nie anders as om te hoor nie," voeg Harry vinnig by. "Ek is jammer –"

"Dis nou nie hoe ek wou hê dat jy moet uitvind nie," sê mnr. Weasley en hy lyk bekommerd.

"Nee – regtig, dis oukei. Op hierdie manier het u nie u woord teenoor Broddelwerk gebreek nie, en weet ek wat aan die gang is."

"Harry, jy moet baie bang wees –"

"Ek is nie," sê Harry eerlik. "Rigtig," voeg hy by, want mnr. Weasley lyk ongelowig. "Dis nie dat ek probeer om 'n held te wees nie, maar Sirius Swardt kan tog nie erger as Woldemort wees nie, kan hy?"

Mnr. Weasley skram weg toe hy die naam hoor, maar lewer nie kommentaar nie.

"Harry, ek het geweet jy is taaier as wat Broddelwerk skynbaar dink, en ek is verlig dat jy nie bang is nie, maar –"

"Arthur!" roep mev. Weasley, wat die res nou aanjaag trein toe. "Arthur, wagt maak julle? Die trein gaan ry!"

"Hy kom, Molly!" sê mnr. Weasley, maar hy draai terug na Harry en hou aan praat in 'n nog meer gedempte en gejaagde stem. "Luister, jy moet jou woord vir my gee –"

"– dat ek 'n soet seun sal wees en in die kasteel sal bly?" sê Harry grimmig.

"Nie heeltemal nie," sê mnr. Weasley, wat ernstiger lyk as wat Harry hom nog ooit gesien het. "Harry, sweer dat jy nie vir Swardt sal gaan soek nie."

Harry staar. "Wat?"

'n Fluitjie blaas hard: 'n Paar kondukteurs loop langs die trein af en klap al die deure toe.

"Belowe my, Harry," sê mnr. Weasley, en hy praat nog vinniger, "dat wat ook al mag gebeur –"

“Hoekom sal ek na iemand gaan soek wat my wil doodmaak?” sê Harry verward.

“Sweer dat wat jy ook al mag hoor –”

“Arthur, kry klaar!” skree mev. Weasley.

Stoomwolke warrel uit van onder die trein wat reeds begin beweeg het. Harry hardloop na een van die trein se deure en Ron gooi dit oop en staan terug sodat hy kan inspring. Hulle leun deur die venster en waai vir mnr. en mev. Weasley tot die trein om ’n draai gaan en hulle buite sig verdwyn.

“Ek moet met julle praat, alleen,” mompel Harry vir Ron en Hermien toe die trein begin spoed optel.

“Gaan weg, Ginny,” sê Ron.

“O, dis baie gaaf,” sê Ginny vererg toe sy wegstap.

Harry, Ron en Hermien stap met die gang af op soek na ’n leë kompartement, maar almal is vol, behalwe die een heel aan die end van die trein waar hul bagasie is.

Hier is net een passasier, ’n man wat vas aan die slaap langs die venster sit. Harry, Ron en Hermien steek op die drumpel vas. Die Hogwarts Express word gewoonlik net vir studente bespreek en hulle het nog nooit ’n volwassene op die trein gesien nie, behalwe die heks wat die kostrolle stoot.

Die vreemdeling dra ’n besonder verslete towenaarsmantel en -kleed wat al op verskeie plekke gestop is. Hy lyk siek en uitgeput. Hoewel hy nog redelik jonk is, is sy ligbruin hare gespikkel met grys.

“Wie dink julle is dit?” sis Ron toe hulle op die sitplekke wat die verste van die venster af is, gaan sit.

“Professor R. J. Lupin,” fluister Hermien dadelik.

“Hoe weet jy dit?”

“Dit staan op sy tas,” antwoord Hermien en wys na die bagasierak bokant die man se kop. Daar staan ’n kleinerige, gehawende tas wat met ’n groot klomp netjies geknoopte tou aanmekaar gehou word. “Professor R. J. Lupin” is in een hoek gedruk in letters wat afdop.

“Wonder wat hy gaan gee?” sê Ron en kyk fronsend na professor Lupin se asbleek profiel.

“Dis tog duidelik,” fluister Hermien. “Daar’s net een vakature, nie waar nie? Verdediging teen die Donker Kunste.”

Harry, Ron en Hermien het reeds twee onderwysers vir Verdediging teen die Donker Kunste gehad, en albei van hulle het net een jaar gehou. Daar is gerugte dat daar ’n vloek op die vak rus.

“Wel, ek hoop hy’s mans genoeg daarvoor,” sê Ron twyfelagtig. “Hy lyk vir my of net een goeie towerspreuk genoeg sal wees om met hom klaar te speel, en vir julle? In elk geval . . .” hy draai na Harry, “wat wil jy ons vertel?”

Harry verduidelik alles oor mnr. en mev. Weasley se rusie en die waar-

skewing wat mnr. Weasley vir hom gegee het. Toe hy klaar is, lyk Ron heeltemal oorbluf en Hermien hou haar hande oor haar mond. Sy laat hulle uiteindelik sak om te sê, "Sirius Swardt het ontsnap om jou te vermoor? O, Harry . . . jy moet baie, baie versigtig wees. Moenie moeilikheid soek nie, Harry . . ."

"Ek soek nooit moeilikheid nie," sê Harry omgekrap. "Die moeilikheid kry my gewoonlik eerste."

"Harry is darem seker nie so onnosel om na 'n mal mens te gaan soek wat hom wil vermoor nie," sê Ron bewurig.

Hulle is baie meer geskok deur die nuus as wat Harry verwag het. Dit lyk of sowel Ron as Hermien baie banger vir Swardt is as hy.

"Niemand weet hoe hy uit Azkaban ontsnap het nie," sê Ron ongemaaklik. "Nog niemand het dit reggekry nie. En hy's nog 'n hoësekerheidsgevangene ook."

"Hulle sal hom darem seker vang, of hoe?" sê Hermien ernstig. "Ek bedoel, daar is al daardie Moggels wat na hom soek en . . ."

"Wat's daardie geraas?" sê Ron skielik.

'n Dowwe, blikkerige soort fluitgeluid kom iewers vandaan. Hulle kyk in die kompartement rond.

"Dit kom uit jou trommel, Harry," sê Ron terwyl hy opstaan en sy hand na die bagasierak toe uitsteek. 'n Oomblik later haal hy die sakgrootte Kulklikker uit die voue van een van Harry se mantels. Dit spin verskriklik vinnig op die palm van Ron se hand, en dit gloei helder.

"Is dit 'n Kulklikker?" sê Hermien vol belangstelling, terwyl sy opstaan om beter te sien.

"Ja . . . maar dis 'n baie goedkoop een," sê Ron. "Dit het heeltemal mal gegaan toe ek dit aan Errol se been vasgemaak het om dit vir Harry te stuur."

"Het jy op daardie oomblik iets gedoen wat nie heeltemal eerlik was nie?" sê Hermien uitgeslape.

"Nee! Wel . . . ek was nie veronderstel om vir Errol te gebruik nie. Jy weet mos hy kan nie regtig meer ver vlieg nie . . . maar hoe anders moes ek Harry se present by hom kry?"

"Sit dit terug in die trommel," stel Harry voor, terwyl die Kulklikker steeds deurdringend fluit, "netnou maak dit hom wakker."

Hy knik na professor Lupin. Ron druk die Kulklikker binne-in 'n besonder walglike paar ou sokkies van oom Vernon om die klank te demp, en maak die trommel se deksel toe.

"Ons kan dit in Hogsmeade laat nagaan," sê Ron toe hy weer gaan sit. "Hulle verkoop daardie soort goed in Derwisj en Boems; towerinstrumente en goed, so sê Fred en George."

"Weet jy baie van Hogsmeade af?" vra Hermien gretig. "Ek het gelees dis die enigste Moggelvrye nedersetting in Brittanje –"

“Ja, ek dink dit is,” sê Ron op ’n ongeërgde manier, “maar dis nie hoe-
kom ek soontoe wil gaan nie. Ek wil by Honeydukes kom!”

“Wat’s dit?” vra Hermien.

“Dis hierdie lekkergoedwinkel,” sê Ron met ’n dromerige uitdrukking
op sy gesig, “waar hulle *alles* het . . . Peperonnutte – hulle laat jou mond
rook – en groot, vet Sjukoballe vol aarbeimousse en geklitste room, en
fantastiese suikerveerpenne wat jy in die klas kan suig terwyl dit lyk asof
jy dink wat jy volgende gaan skryf –”

“Maar Hogsmeade is ’n baie interessante plek, nè?” hou Hermien gre-
tig vol. “In *Plekke van Historiese Towy* sê hulle die herberg was die hoof-
kwartier tydens die gnoom-rebellie van 1612, en dat die Kermende Krot
glo die gebou in Brittanje is wat die meeste spoke het –”

– en tamaai groot suursuikerballe wat jou ’n ent bo die grond laat
sweef as jy daaraan suig,” sê Ron, wat duidelik nie ’n woord van wat Her-
mien sê, gehoor het nie.

Hermien kyk na Harry.

“Sal dit nie pret wees om uit die skool te kan gaan en Hogsmeade te
verken nie?”

“Sal seker,” sê Harry somber. “Julle sal my maar moet vertel wat alles
daar aangaan.”

“Wat bedoel jy?” sê Ron.

“Ek kan nie gaan nie. Die Dursleys het nie my toestemmingsbrief ge-
teken nie, en Broddelwerk wou ook nie.”

Ron lyk geskok.

“Jy, mag nie gaan nie? Maar – nee, komaan – McGonagall of iemand sal
vir jou toestemming gee –”

Harry lag hol. Professor McGonagall, hoof van die Griffindor-huis, is
baie streng.

– of ons kan vir Fred en George vra, hulle ken elke geheime tunnel
wat uit die kasteel –”

“Ron!” sê Hermien kwaai. “Ek dink nie Harry moet uit die skool glip
terwyl Swardt op vrye voet is nie –”

“Ja, ek sou sê dis wat McGonagall sal sê as ek haar moet vra,” sê Harry
bitter.

“Maar as ons by hom is,” sê Ron driftig vir Hermien, “dan sal Swardt
dit nie waag –”

“Ag, Ron, moenie twak praat nie,” snou Hermien hom toe. “Swardt
het reeds ’n hele spul mense in die middel van ’n besige straat vermoor,
dink jy regtig hy gaan bang wees om vir Harry aan te val net omdat *ons*
daar is?”

Terwyl sy dit sê, vroetel sy met die bande van Kromskeen se mandjie.

“Moenie daai ding laat uitkom nie!” sê Ron, maar dis te laat; Krom-
skeen wip ligvoets uit die mandjie, rek hom uit, gaap, en spring op Ron

se skoot; die knop in Ron se sak bewe en hy stoot vir Kromskeen erger-
lik weg.

"Ore pad!"

"Ron, moenie!" sê Hermien vererg.

Ron is op die punt om terug te kap toe professor Lupin beweeg. Hulle hou hom lugtig dop, maar hy draai bloot sy kop na die ander kant, en slaap verder met sy mond wat halfoop hang.

Die Hogwarts Express beweeg koersvas noordwaarts en die landskap buite die venster word wilder en donkerder terwyl die wolke bo hulle al digter word. Mense storm op en af verby hul kompartement se deur. Kromskeen het homself in 'n leë sitplek tuisgemaak, sy platgedrukte ge-
sig is na Ron gedraai en sy oë is vasgehael op Ron se boonste sak.

Teen een uur daag die gesette heks met die kostrollie voor die kompartement se deur op.

"Dink julle ons moet hom wakker maak?" vra Ron en knik ongemaklik na professor Lupin. "Hy lyk of dit hom nie sal kwaaddoen om iets te eet nie."

Hermien benader professor Lupin versigtig.

"H'm – professor?" sê sy. "Verskoon my – professor?"

Hy roer nie.

"Moet jou nie bekommer nie, liefie," sê die heks terwyl sy vir Harry 'n groot stapel heksetelkoekies aangee. "Ek is voor by die drywer as hy honger is wanneer hy wakker word."

"Ek veronderstel hy slaap wel?" sê Ron saggies toe die heks die kompartement se deur toestoot. "Ek bedoel – hy is nie dood nie, is hy?"

"Nee, nee, hy haal asem," fluister Hermien en neem die heksetelkoekie wat Harry na haar uithou.

Hy is miskien nie goeie geselskap nie, maar professor Lupin se teenwoordigheid in hul kompartement kom handig te pas. Teen die agtermiddag, net toe dit begin reën sodat die wuiwende heuwels voor die vensters dof word, hoor hulle weer eens voetstappe in die gang en die drie mense van wie hulle die minste hou, verskyn in die deur: Draco Malfoy, vergesel van sy trawante, Vincent Krabbe en Gerhardus Goliat.

Draco Malfoy en Harry is al vyande van die eerste oomblik toe hulle mekaar ontmoet het op hul heel eerste treinrit na Hogwarts. Malfoy, wat 'n skerp, bleek, smalende gesig het, is in Huis Slibberin; hy speel Soeker vir Slibberin se Kwiddiekspan, dieselfde posisie wat Harry vir die Griffindorspan bekleed. Krabbe en Goliat lyk of hulle net bestaan om te doen wat Malfoy sê. Hulle is breed en bonkig; Krabbe is langer met 'n poedingbakhaarstyl en 'n baie dik nek; Goliat het kort stekelhare en lang gorillaarms.

"Wel, kyk wie is hier," sê Malfoy in sy gewone lui, dralende stem, terwyl hy die kompartement se deur ooptrek. "Pottier en die Wesel."

Krabbe en Goliath giggellag soos trolle.

“Ek hoor jou pa het hierdie somer uiteindelik sy hande op ’n bietjie goud geleë, Weasley,” sê Malfoy. “Jou ma is seker dood van die skok, h’m?”

Ron staan so vinnig op dat hy Kromskeen se mandjie grond toe laat tuimel. Professor Lupin maak ’n snorkgeluid.

“Wie’s dit?” vra Malfoy en val outomaties terug toe hy vir Lupin sien.

“Nuwe onderwyser,” sê Harry, wat ook regop gekom het, ingeval hy vir Ron moet keer. “Wat het jy nou weer gesê, Malfoy?”

Malfoy se bleek oë vernou, maar hy is nie dom genoeg om onder ’n onderwyser se neus skoor te soek nie.

“Komaan,” brom hy wrewelrig vir Krabbe en Goliath, en hulle blaas die aftog.

Harry en Ron gaan weer sit en Ron masseer sy kneukels.

“Ek gaan vanjaar niks twak van daardie Malfoy vat nie,” sê hy vererg. “Ek bedoel dit. As hy nog een keer iets oor my familie sê, dan gaan ek sy kop vasvat en —”

Ron maak ’n gewelddadige beweging in die lug.

“Ron,” sis Hermien en wys na professor Lupin, “wees versigtig.”

Professor Lupin is egter nog steeds vas aan die slaap.

Dit reën al swaarder hoe verder noord die trein jaag, die vensters is nou ’n soliede, glimmende grys wat geleidelik donkerder word tot die lanterns in die gange en bo die bagasierakke aan die brand flikker. Die trein ratel, die reën kletter, die wind brul, maar professor Lupin slaap steeds voort.

“Ons moet amper daar wees,” sê Ron en leun vorentoe om verby professor Lupin na die vensters wat nou heeltemal donker is, te kyk.

Hy het die woorde skaars gesê of die trein begin spoed verloor.

“Briljant,” sê Ron toe hy opstaan en versigtig verby professor Lupin skuifel om te sien wat buite aangaan. “Ek is dood van die honger, ek wil by die fees kom.”

“Ons kan nog nie daar wees nie,” sê Hermien terwyl sy na haar horlosie kyk.

“Hoekom stop ons dan?”

Die trein loop al stadiger en stadiger. Soos die geluid van die suiers wegraak, klink dit of die wind en die reën nog harder as tevore teen die vensters raas.

Harry, wat die naaste aan die deur is, staan op om in die gang af te kyk. Oral langs die wa word koppe nuuskierig by die kompartemente uitgesteek.

Die trein kom rukkend tot stilstand en aan die veraf stampe en dowwe slae kan hulle hoor dat stukke bagasie bo van die rakke afval. Toe, sonder waarskuwing, gaan al die lampe dood en is dit stikdonker om hulle.

“Wat gaan aan?” sê Ron se stem agter Harry.

“Eina!” sê Hermien en snak na asem. “Ron, dit was my voet!”

Harry voel-voel sy pad terug tot by sy sitplek.

“Dink julle die trein het gebreek?”

“Weet nie . . .”

Daar is 'n nare skreegeluid, en Harry sien die dowwe swart buitelyn van Ron waar hy 'n kol op die venster skoonvryf en buitentoe kyk.

“Iets beweeg daar buite,” sê Ron. “Ek dink dis mense wat wil opklim . . .”

Die kompartement se deur vlieg skielik oop en iemand val pynlik oor Harry se bene.

“Jammer! Weet julle wat aangaan? Eina! Skies –”

“Hallo, Neville,” sê Harry terwyl hy in die donker romdtas en vir Neville aan sy mantel ophelp.

“Harry? Is dit jy? Wat gaan aan?”

“Geen idee nie! Sit –”

Daar is 'n harde sissgeluid en 'n kreet van pyn; Neville het amper op kromskeen gaan sit.

“Ek gaan by die drywer hoor wat aangaan,” kom Hermien se stem. Harry voel hoe sy verby hom beweeg, hoor hoe die deur weer oopskuif en toe 'n slag en twee harde uitroepe van pyn.

“Wie's dit?”

“Wie's dit?”

“Ginny?”

“Hermien?”

“Wat maak jy hier?”

“Ek soek vir Ron –”

“Kom in en gaan sit –”

“Nie hier nie!” sê Harry vinnig. “Ek's hier!”

“Eina!” sê Neville.

“Stil!” sê 'n hees stem skielik.

Professor Lupin het uiteindelik wakker geword. Harry hoor bewegings in Lupin se hoek. Niemand sê 'n woord nie.

Daar is 'n sagte ritselgeluid en dan vul 'n bewende lig die kompartement. Dit lyk of professor Lupin 'n hand vol vlamme vashou. Hulle verlig sy afgematte grys gesig, maar sy oë lyk helder en wakker.

“Bly waar julle is,” sê hy in dieselfde hees stem, terwyl hy stadig orent kom met die hand vol vuur uitgestrek voor hom.

Die deur gly egter oop voor professor Lupin dit kan bereik.

In die opening, verlig deur die bewende vlamme in Lupin se hand, staan 'n figuur wat in 'n mantel gehul is en wat so hoog soos die dak bo hulle troon. Die gesig is heeltemal versteek agter die kap. Harry se oë darterel na onder, en wat hy sien, laat sy maag pynlik saamtrek. 'n Hand steek onder die mantel uit en dit glinster grys en lyk slymerig en vol skubbe, soos iets wat dood is en in water lê en vrot het . . .

Dis net vir 'n oomblik sigbaar. Die hand word skielik in die voue van die swart materiaal ingetrek, asof die kreatuur onder die mantel Harry se blik gevoel het.

Toe trek die ding onder die kap sy asem stadig, roggelend in, asof dit probeer om meer as blote lug uit die atmosfeer te suig.

'n Intense koue swiep oor hulle almal. Harry voel hoe sy eie asem in sy keel stok. Die koue gaan dieper as sy vel. Dis in sy borskas, binne-in sy hart . . .

Harry se oë rol om in sy kop. Hy kan nie sien nie. Hy voel of hy in die koue gaan beswyk. Daar is 'n ruising soos water in sy ore. Hy word ondergesleep, die ruising word harder . . .

En toe, van ver af, hoor hy 'n geskree; vreesaanjaende, angsbevange, pleitende krete. Hy wil wie dit ook al is, gaan help, hy probeer om sy arms te beweeg, maar hy kan nie . . . dik wit mis warrel om hom, binne-in hom –

“Harry! Harry! Makeer jy iets?”

Iemand klap sy gesig

“W-wat?”

Harry maak sy oë oop. Daar is lanterns bo hom, en die vloer bewe – die Hogwarts Express beweeg weer en die ligte is terug. Hy moet uit sy sitplek tot op die vloer gegly het. Ron en Hermien kniel langs hom en bokant hulle kan hy vir Neville en professor Lupin sien wat hom dophou. Harry voel baie siek; toe hy sy hand lig om sy bril terug te druk, voel hy die koue sweet op sy gesig.

Ron en Hermien help hom terug op sy sitplek.

“Is jy oukei?” vra Ron senuagtig.

“Ja,” sê Harry en kyk vinnig na die deur. Die figuur in die mantel en kap het verdwyn. “Wat het gebeur? Waar is daardie – daardie ding? Wie het so geskree?”

“Niemand het geskree nie,” sê Ron en hy klink nog meer op sy senuwees.

Harry kyk rond in die helder verligte kompartement. Ginny en Neville staan terug na hom; hulle is albei baie bleek.

“Maar ek het 'n geskree gehoor –”

'n Harde klaggeluid laat almal wip van die skrik. Professor Lupin is besig om 'n enorme blok sjokolade in stukke te breek.

“Hier,” sê hy vir Harry en gee vir hom 'n besonder groot stuk. “Eet dit. Dit sal help.”

Harry neem die sjokolade, maar hy eet dit nie.

“Wat was daardie ding?” vra hy vir Lupin.

“'n Dementor,” sê Lupin, wat nou vir almal sjokolade uitdeel. “Een van die Dementors van Azkaban.”

Almal gaap hom aan. Professor Lupin frommel die sjokoladepapier op en sit dit in sy sak.

“Eet,” herhaal hy. “Dit sal help. Ek moet met die drywer gaan praat, verskoon my . . .”

Hy stap verby Harry en verdwyn in die gang af.

“Is jy seker jy is oukei, Harry?” sê Hermien terwyl sy vir Harry bekommerd dophou.

“Ek verstaan dit nie . . . wat het gebeur?” vra Harry terwyl hy nog meer weet van sy gesig afvee.

“Wel – daardie ding – die Dementor – het daar gestaan en rondkyk (ek bedoel, dis wat ek dink hy gedoen het, ek kon nie sy gesig sien nie) – en jy – jy –”

“Ek het gedink jy’s besig om ’n toeval of iets te kry,” sê Ron, wat nog steeds verskrik lyk. “Jy’t soort van styf geword en van jou sitplek afgeval en begin ruk –”

“En professor Lupin het oor jou getree, en na die Dementor geloop en sy towerstaf uitgehaal,” sê Hermien, “en toe’t hy gesê, niemand van ons steek vir Sirius Swardt onder sy mantel weg nie. Loop.’ Maar daardie Dementor het nie geroer nie, toe mompel Lupin iets en ’n silwer ding skiet uit sy towerstaf, en toe’t hy omgedraai en soort van weggegly . . .”

“Dit was aaklig,” sê Neville in ’n hoër stem as gewoonlik. “Het julle gevoel hoe koud dit geword het toe hy ingekom het?”

“Ek het baie snaaks gevoel,” sê Ron en beweeg sy skouers ongemaklik. “Nes of ek nooit weer gelukkig sal wees nie . . .”

Ginny, wat in ’n houpie in haar hoek sit en amper so erg lyk as wat Harry voel, gee ’n klein snikkie; Hermien gaan na haar en sit ’n vertroostende arm om haar.

“Maar nie een van julle het – het van jul sitplekke afgeval nie?” vra Harry ongemaklik.

“Nee,” sê Ron en kyk weer bekommerd na Harry. “Maar Ginny het verskriklik gebewe . . .”

Harry kan dit glad nie verstaan nie. Hy voel beweerig en swak, asof hy besig is om na ’n kwaai griepaanval te herstel; hy begin egter ook skaam voel. Hoekom het net hy so gereageer, en niemand anders nie?

Professor Lupin het intussen teruggekom. Toe hy inkom, gaan hy staan, kyk om hom en sê met ’n klein glimlaggie, “Ek het nie gif in daardie sjokolade gesit nie, hoor . . .”

Harry vat ’n happie en tot sy groot verbasing voel hy hoe die warmte tot in die punte van sy vingers en tone versprei.

“Ons sal binne tien minute by Hogwarts wees,” sê professor Lupin. “Hoe voel jy, Harry?”

Harry vra nie hoe professor Lupin weet wat sy naam is nie.

“Goed,” mompel hy verleë.

Tydens die res van die rit praat niemand veel nie. Uiteindelik kom die trein by Hogsmeade-stasie tot stilstand, en daar is ’n groot geskarrel om

af te klim: uile hoe-hoe, katte miaau, en Neville se troetelpadda kwaak luidkeels onder sy hoed. Dit is snerpend koud op die klein perron; die reën stort in yskoue vlae neer.

“Eerstejaars, hiernatoe!” roep ’n bekende stem. Harry, Ron en Hermien draai om en sien die reusebuitelyn van Hagrid aan die ander kant van die perron, waar hy die verskrikte nuwe studente nader wink vir hul tradisionele vaart oor die meer.

“Hoe gaan dit, julle drie?” gil Hagrid oor die skare se koppe. Hulle waai vir hom, maar kry nie kans om met hom te praat nie, want die massa mense om hulle druk en stoot hulle al met die perron langs. Harry, Ron en Hermien volg die res van die skool na ’n modderige pad waar ten minste ’n honderd poskoetse op die oorblywende studente wag. Elkeen word getrek, so reken Harry, deur ’n onsigbare perd, want toe hulle in een klim en die deur toemaak, trek die koets heeltemal vanself weg en skud en skommel in gelid agter die ander aan.

Die koets ruik effens na muf en strooi. Harry voel beter na die sjokolade, maar hy voel nog steeds swak. Ron en Hermien kyk gedurig sydelings na hom asof hulle bang is dat hy weer gaan ineenstort.

Die koets rammel in die rigting van ’n paar manjifieke smeedysterhekke tussen klippilare waarop gevleuelde wildevarke rus. Harry sien nog twee reusagtige Dementors in mantels met kappe wat aan weerskan-te wag staan. ’n Golf van koue naarheid dreig om hom weer te oorweldig; hy leun terug in die knopperige sitplek en maak sy oë toe tot hulle deur die hekke is. Die koets tel spoed op teen die lang opdraand tot by die kasteel; Hermien leun deur een van die klein venstertjies en kyk hoe die talle torinkies en kantele nader kom. Uiteindelik kom die koets slingerend tot stilstand en Hermien en Ron klim uit.

Toe Harry uitklim, weerklink ’n dralende en opgetoë stem in sy ore.

“Het jy flou geval, Potter? Vertel Loggerenberg die waarheid? Jy het so waar flou geword?”

Malfoy druk Hermien met sy elmboog uit die pad om Harry op die kliptrappe na die kasteel voor te keer. Hy lyk hoogs in sy noppies en sy bleek oë skitter gemeen.

“Voertsek, Malfoy,” sê Ron deur geklemde kake.

“Het jy ook flou geword, Weasley?” sê Malfoy hard. “Het die nare ou Dementor vir jou ook bang gemaak, Weasley?”

“Is hier ’n probleem?” vra ’n bedaarde stem. Professor Lupin het so pas uit die volgende koets geklim.

Malfoy staar astant na professor Lupin; dis duidelik dat hy die gestopte kleet en die gehawende tas deeglik raak sien. Met ’n sweem van sarkasme in sy stem sê hy, “O, nee – h’m – *professor*,” toe lag hy spottend vir Krabbe en Goliat en lei hulle op met die trappe na die kasteel.

Hermien pomp vir Ron in die rug om hom aan te jaag, en die driestuks

sluit aan by die skare wat met die trappe na bo swerm, verby die massiewe eikehoutdeure, tot in die spelonkagtige ingangsportaal wat deur vlammeende fakkels verlig word en waarvandaan 'n manjifieke marmertrap na die mooiste verdieping lei.

Die regterkantse deur voor die Groot Saal staan oop; Harry volg die skare daarheen, maar hy het skaars 'n glimp van die betowerde plafon, wat vanaand swart en bewolk is, gekry of 'n stem roep, "Potter! La Grangel! Ek wil julle albei sien!"

Harry en Hermien draai verbaas om. Professor McGonagall, die Transfigurasie-onderwyser en hoof van Huis Griffindor, roep oor die skare se koppe. Sy is 'n heks wat baie streng lyk en haar hare in 'n stywe bolla dra; haar skerp oë is omraam deur 'n bril met vierkantige glase. Dis met 'n gevoel van dreigende onheil dat Harry 'n pad na haar toe oopveg; professor McGonagall het 'n manier om hom te laat voel dat hy iets verkeerd gedoen het.

"Dis nie nodig om so bekommerd te lyk nie – ek wil net met julle in my kantoor praat," sê sy vir hulle. "Hiernatoe, Weasley."

Ron staan terwyl professor McGonagall vir Harry en Hermien van die geselsende groep mense af weglei; hulle stap saam met haar deur die ingangsportaal, op met die marmertrappe en af met die gang.

Toe hulle by haar kantoor instap, 'n klein vertrek met 'n groot, gesellige vuur, wys professor McGonagall vir Harry en Hermien om te gaan sit. Sy maak haarself tuis agter haar lessenaar en sê reguit, "Professor Lupin het 'n uil vooruit gestuur om te sê dat jy op die trein siek geword het, Potter."

Voor Harry kan antwoord, is daar 'n sagte klop aan die deur en Madame Pomfrey, die matrone, kom ingestommel.

Harry voel hoe hy rooi in die gesig word. Dis erg genoeg dat hy flou geword het of wat ook al, sonder dat almal 'n bohaai daaroor hoef te maak.

"Ek makeer niks," sê hy. "Ek het niks nodig nie –"

"O, dis al weer jy?" sê Madame Pomfrey, terwyl sy dit wat hy sê, ignoreer en oorbuig om hom van naderby te bekijk. "Ek veronderstel jy't al weer iets gevaarliks aangevang?"

"Dit was 'n Dementor, Poppie," sê professor McGonagall.

Hulle kyk onheilspellend na mekaar en Madame Pomfrey maak afkeurende klikgeluide.

"Dementors om 'n skool," brom sy, terwyl sy Harry se hare terugstoot en aan sy voorkop voel. "Hy sal nie die eerste een wees om in mekaar te stort nie. Ja, hy's koud en sweterig. Aaklige goed, dis wat hulle is, en hul uitwerking op mense wat reeds delikaat is –"

"Ek is nie delikaat nie!" sê Harry vererg.

"Natuurlik is jy nie," sê Madame Pomfrey ingedagte terwyl sy sy pols neem.

“Wat het hy nodig?” sê professor McGonagall skerp. “Bedrus? Of moet hy die nag in die siekeboeg deurbring?”

“Ek makeer niks!” sê Harry en spring op. Hy kan die gedagte aan wat Draco Malfoy sal sê as hy na die siekeboeg moet gaan nie verdra nie.

“Wel, hy moet op die minste 'n stukkie sjokolade eet,” sê Madame Pomfrey wat nou in Harry se oë probeer kyk.

“Ek het reeds gehad,” sê Harry. “Professor Lupin het vir my gegee. Hy't vir ons almal gegee.”

“Het hy sowaar?” sê Madame Pomfrey goedkeurend. “Dan het ons uiteindelik 'n onderwyser vir Verdediging teen die Donker Kunste wat sy geneesmiddels ken.”

“Is jy seker jy voel gesond, Potter?” sê professor McGonagall skerp.

“Ja,” sê Harry.

“Goed dan. Wag asseblief buite, ek wil net 'n vinnige woordjie met jufrou La Grange oor haar klasrooster wissel, dan kan ons saam na die fees gaan.”

Harry stap uit gang toe, met Madame Pomfrey wat op pad siekeboeg toe is en onderlangs binnensmonds brom. Hy hoef net 'n paar minute te wag voor Hermien uitkom. Sy lyk baie in haar skik oor iets en word gevolg deur professor McGonagall. Die drie van hulle stap saam terug af met die marmertrappe na die Groot Saal toe.

Dit is 'n see van gepunte swart hoede; elk van die lang huistafels is gepak met studente wie se gesigte gloei in die lig van duisende kerse wat bo die tafels in die lug sweef. Professor Flickerpitt, 'n kleinerige towenaar met 'n dik bos wit hare, dra 'n baie ou hoed en 'n driepootstoel uit die saal.

“Ag nee,” sê Hermien sag, “ons het die sorteerdery gemis!”

Nuwe studente by Hogwarts word in huise ingedeel deur die sorteerhoed op te sit wat dan die naam van die huis waarin hulle die beste pas, hard uitroep (Griffindor, Raweklou, Hoesenproes of Slibberin). Professor McGonagall stap na haar leë stoel by die personeeltafel en Harry en Hermien gaan so ongemerk moontlik in die teenoorgestelde rigting, na die Griffindortafel. Mense kyk om na hulle soos hulle agterom die saal beweeg, en 'n paar wys na Harry. Het die storie van hoe Harry voor die Dementor ineengestort het so vinnig versprei?

Hy en Hermien gaan sit aan weerskante van Ron wat vir hulle plek gehou het.

“Wat wou sy hê?” brom hy vir Harry.

Harry begin in 'n fluisterstem verduidelik, maar op daardie oomblik staan die skoolhoof op om te praat, en hy bly stil.

Hoewel professor Dompeldorius baie oud is, gee hy altyd die indruk van hope energie. Hy het lang silwer hare en baard, 'n halfmaanbril en 'n ontsettende krom neus. Hy word dikwels beskryf as die grootste towenaar.

Haar van sy tyd, maar dit is nie hoekom Harry hom respekteer nie. 'n Mens kan nie anders as om vir Albus Dompeldorius te vertrou nie, en toe Harry sien hoe hy met 'n breë glimlag na die studente kyk, voel hy vir die eerste keer kalm sedert die Dementor by die kompartement ingekom het.

"Welkom!" sê Dompeldorius, en die kerslig glinster op sy baard. "Welkom by nog 'n jaar te Hogwarts! Ek het 'n paar dinge wat ek vir julle moet sê, en aangesien een van hulle baie ernstig is, dink ek dis raadsaam om dit al te handel voor julle deur ons voortrefflike fees benewel word."

Dompeldorius maak sy keel skoon en gaan voort. "Soos julle almal weet met dié dat hulle die Hogwarts Express deursoek het, het ons skool besoekers in die vorm van 'n paar Dementors van Azkaban, wat hier is op bevel van die Ministerie vir Towerkuns."

Hy bly stil, en Harry onthou dat mnr. Weasley gesê het dat Dompeldorius nie daarvan hou dat die Dementors die skool bewaak nie.

"Hulle is by elke ingang na die terrein gestasioneer," gaan Dompeldorius voort, "en terwyl hulle by ons is, moet ek dit duidelik stel dat niemand die skoolterrein sonder verlof mag verlaat nie. Dementors word nie om die bos gelei deur truuks en vermommings nie – selfs nie deur onsigbaarheidsmantels nie," voeg hy onomwonde by, en Harry en Ron loer na mekaar. "Dit is nie in die aard van 'n Dementor om na verskonings en mooipraatjies te luister nie. Ek waarsku elkeen van julle dus om hulle nie rede te gee om julle kwaad aan te doen nie. Ek maak staat op die Prefekte, en op ons nuwe Hoofseun en Hoofdogter, om seker te maak dat nie een van ons studente met die Dementors bots nie."

Percy, wat 'n paar plekke van Harry af sit, pof homself op en kyk belangrik om hom rond. Dompeldorius bly weer stil; hy kyk baie ernstig oor die saal, en niemand beweeg of maak 'n geluid nie.

"Op 'n meer aangename noot," gaan hy voort, "is dit 'n plesier om twee nuwe onderwysers in ons geledere te verwelkom."

"Eerstens, professor Lupin, wat ingestem het om die pos van Verdediging teen die Donker Kunste te vul."

Daar is 'n verspreide en redelik ongegeesterde applous. Net diegene wat op die trein saam met professor Lupin in die kompartement was, klap hard, en Harry natuurlik ook. Professor Lupin lyk besonder verwaarloos lings al die ander onderwysers in hul beste klere.

"Kyk vir Snerp!" sis Ron in Harry se oor.

Professor Snerp, die Towerdrankies-onderwyser, staan by die personeeltafel af na professor Lupin. Dit is algemene kennis dat Snerp die pos van Verdediging teen die Donker Kunste wou hê, maar selfs Harry wat vir Snerp haat, is geskok toe hy die uitdrukking sien wat die bleek, skraal gesig verwing. Dit is meer as woede: dit is walging. Harry ken daardie uitdrukking alte goed; dit is hoe Snerp lyk elke keer dat hy na Harry kyk.

"Wat ons tweede nuwe aanstelling betref," gaan Dompeldorius voort

toe die louwarm applous vir professor Lupin weggesteek het, "wel, dit spyt my om te moet sê dat professor Kesselbrennen wat Versorging van Magiese Kreature aangebied het, aan die einde van verlede jaar afgetree het om meer tyd met sy oorblywende ledemate deur te bring. Ek is egter verheug om te kan sê dat sy plek vol gestaan gaan word deur niemand anders as ons eie Rubeus Hagrid nie, wat ingestem het om hierdie pos te vul tesame met sy boswagterspligte."

Harry, Ron en Hermien staan oorbluf na mekaar. Toe begin hulle ook hande klap en juig; veral die Griffindortafel is besonder rumoerig. Harry leun vooroor om vir Hagrid te sien. Hy is robynrooi in die gesig en kyk af op sy enorme hande, sy bree glimlag is weggesteek agter sy gekoekte swart baard.

"Ons moes dit geweet het!" brul Ron en hamer op die tafel. "Wie anders sal 'n boek wat byt, voorskryf?"

Harry, Ron en Hermien is die laastes wat ophou klap, en toe professor Dompeldorius weer begin praat, sien hulle hoe Hagrid sy oë aan die tafeldoek afvee.

"Wel, ek sou sê dis alles wat van belang is," sê Dompeldorius. "Laat die fees begin!"

Die goue borde en glase voor hulle is skielik vol kos en drankies. Harry, wat eensklaps rasend honger is, help homself aan alles wat binne bereik is en val weg.

Dit is 'n heerlike fees; die saal weerklink van gelag en gesels en die gekletter van messe en vurke. Harry, Ron en Hermien is egter gretig om klaar te maak sodat hulle met Hagrid kan gaan praat. Hulle weet wat dit vir hom beteken om 'n onderwyser te wees. Hagrid is nie 'n ten volle opgeleide towenaar nie; hy is in sy derde jaar uit Hogwarts geskors vir 'n misdaad wat hy nie gepleeg het nie. Dit was Harry, Ron en Hermien wat Hagrid se naam die vorige jaar in ere herstel het.

Einde ten laaste, toe die laaste krieseltjie pampoentert uit die goue borde weggesmelt het, kondig Dompeldorius aan dat dit tyd is dat almal bed toe moet gaan en hulle kry hul kans.

"Geluk, Hagrid!" gil Hermien toe hulle by die onderwysers se tafel kom.

"Alles te danke aan julle drie," sê Hagrid en vee sy blink gesig aan sy servet af en kyk op na hulle. "Kan dit nie glo nie . . . groot man, Dompeldorius . . . het reguit na my hut gekom na professor Kesselbrennen gesê het dat hy genoeg gehad het . . . dis wat ek nog altyd wou doen . . ."

Totaal ontroer deur emosie, bêre hy sy gesig in sy servet, en professor McGonagall wys vir hulle dat hulle moet loop.

Harry, Ron en Hermien, nou baie moeg, sluit by die Griffindors aan wat met die marmertappe boontoe stroom en langs nog meer gange en op met nog trappe na die geheime ingang van die Griffindortoring loop.

in Groot portret van 'n vet vrou in 'n pienk rok vra vir hulle, "Wagwoord?"

"Ek kom, ek kom!" roep Percy van agter die skare. "Die nuwe wagwoord is *Fortuna Major*!"

"Agge nee," sê Neville Loggerenberg bekommerd. Hy sukkel altyd om die wagwoord te onthou.

Deur die portretopening en deur die geselskamer, en dan verdeel die seuns en dogters om na hul afsonderlike trappe te gaan. Harry klim die wenteltrap uit met geen ander gedagte in sy kop as hoe lekker dit is om terug te wees nie. Hulle bereik die bekende, ronde slaapsaal met sy vyf hemelbeddens, en toe Harry om hom kyk, voel hy dat hy uiteindelik weer tuis is.

CHAPTER SIX



TALONS AND TEA LEAVES

When Harry, Ron, and Hermione entered the Great Hall for breakfast the next day, the first thing they saw was Draco Malfoy, who seemed to be entertaining a large group of Slytherins with a very funny story. As they passed, Malfoy did a ridiculous impression of a swooning fit and there was a roar of laughter.

“Ignore him,” said Hermione, who was right behind Harry. “Just ignore him, it’s not worth it. . .”

“Hey, Potter!” shrieked Pansy Parkinson, a Slytherin girl with a face like a pug. “Potter! The dementors are coming, Potter! *Woooooooooo!*”

Harry dropped into a seat at the Gryffindor table, next to George Weasley.

“New third-year course schedules,” said George, passing them over. “What’s up with you, Harry?”

“Malfoy,” said Ron, sitting down on George’s other side and glaring over at the Slytherin table.

George looked up in time to see Malfoy pretending to faint with terror again.

“That little git,” he said calmly. “He wasn’t so cocky last night when the dementors were down at our end of the train. Came running into our compartment, didn’t he, Fred?”

“Nearly wet himself,” said Fred, with a contemptuous glance at Malfoy.

“I wasn’t too happy myself,” said George. “They’re horrible things, those dementors. . . .”

“Sort of freeze your insides, don’t they?” said Fred.

“You didn’t pass out, though, did you?” said Harry in a low voice.

“Forget it, Harry,” said George bracingly. “Dad had to go out to Azkaban one time, remember, Fred? And he said it was the worst place he’d ever been, he came back all weak and shaking. . . . They suck the happiness out of a place, dementors. Most of the prisoners go mad in there.”

“Anyway, we’ll see how happy Malfoy looks after our first Quidditch match,” said Fred. “Gryffindor versus Slytherin, first game of the season, remember?”

The only time Harry and Malfoy had faced each other in a Quidditch match, Malfoy had definitely come off worse. Feeling

slightly more cheerful, Harry helped himself to sausages and fried tomatoes.

Hermione was examining her new schedule.

“Ooh, good, we’re starting some new subjects today,” she said happily.

“Hermione,” said Ron, frowning as he looked over her shoulder, “they’ve messed up your schedule. Look — they’ve got you down for about ten subjects a day. There isn’t enough *time*.”

“I’ll manage. I’ve fixed it all with Professor McGonagall.”

“But look,” said Ron, laughing, “see this morning? Nine o’clock, Divination. And underneath, nine o’clock, Muggle Studies. And” — Ron leaned closer to the schedule, disbelieving — “*look* — underneath that, Arithmancy, *nine o’clock*. I mean, I know you’re good, Hermione, but no one’s *that* good. How’re you supposed to be in three classes at once?”

“Don’t be silly,” said Hermione shortly. “Of course I won’t be in three classes at once.”

“Well, then —”

“Pass the marmalade,” said Hermione.

“But —”

“Oh, Ron, what’s it to you if my schedule’s a bit full?” Hermione snapped. “I told you, I’ve fixed it all with Professor McGonagall.”

Just then, Hagrid entered the Great Hall. He was wearing his long moleskin overcoat and was absentmindedly swinging a dead polecat from one enormous hand.

“All righ’?” he said eagerly, pausing on the way to the staff table. “Yer in my firs’ ever lesson! Right after lunch! Bin up since five

gettin' everythin' ready. . . . Hope it's okay. . . . Me, a teacher . . . hones'ly. . . .”

He grinned broadly at them and headed off to the staff table, still swinging the polecat.

“Wonder what he's been getting ready?” said Ron, a note of anxiety in his voice.

The hall was starting to empty as people headed off toward their first lesson. Ron checked his course schedule.

“We'd better go, look, Divination's at the top of North Tower. It'll take us ten minutes to get there. . . .”

They finished their breakfasts hastily, said good-bye to Fred and George, and walked back through the hall. As they passed the Slytherin table, Malfoy did yet another impression of a fainting fit. The shouts of laughter followed Harry into the entrance hall.

The journey through the castle to North Tower was a long one. Two years at Hogwarts hadn't taught them everything about the castle, and they had never been inside North Tower before.

“There's — got — to — be — a — shortcut,” Ron panted as they climbed their seventh long staircase and emerged on an unfamiliar landing, where there was nothing but a large painting of a bare stretch of grass hanging on the stone wall.

“I think it's this way,” said Hermione, peering down the empty passage to the right.

“Can't be,” said Ron. “That's south, look, you can see a bit of the lake out of the window . . .”

Harry was watching the painting. A fat, dapple-gray pony had just ambled onto the grass and was grazing nonchalantly. Harry was used

to the subjects of Hogwarts paintings moving around and leaving their frames to visit one another, but he always enjoyed watching it. A moment later, a short, squat knight in a suit of armor clanked into the picture after his pony. By the look of the grass stains on his metal knees, he had just fallen off.

“Aha!” he yelled, seeing Harry, Ron, and Hermione. “What villains are these, that trespass upon my private lands! Come to scorn at my fall, perchance? Draw, you knaves, you dogs!”

They watched in astonishment as the little knight tugged his sword out of its scabbard and began brandishing it violently, hopping up and down in rage. But the sword was too long for him; a particularly wild swing made him overbalance, and he landed facedown in the grass.

“Are you all right?” said Harry, moving closer to the picture.

“Get back, you scurvy braggart! Back, you rogue!”

The knight seized his sword again and used it to push himself back up, but the blade sank deeply into the grass and, though he pulled with all his might, he couldn’t get it out again. Finally, he had to flop back down onto the grass and push up his visor to mop his sweating face.

“Listen,” said Harry, taking advantage of the knight’s exhaustion, “we’re looking for the North Tower. You don’t know the way, do you?”

“A quest!” The knight’s rage seemed to vanish instantly. He clanked to his feet and shouted, “Come follow me, dear friends, and we shall find our goal, or else shall perish bravely in the charge!”

He gave the sword another fruitless tug, tried and failed to mount

the fat pony, gave up, and cried, "On foot then, good sirs and gentle lady! On! On!"

And he ran, clanking loudly, into the left side of the frame and out of sight.

They hurried after him along the corridor, following the sound of his armor. Every now and then they spotted him running through a picture ahead.

"Be of stout heart, the worst is yet to come!" yelled the knight, and they saw him reappear in front of an alarmed group of women in crinolines, whose picture hung on the wall of a narrow spiral staircase.

Puffing loudly, Harry, Ron, and Hermione climbed the tightly spiraling steps, getting dizzy and dizzy, until at last they heard the murmur of voices above them and knew they had reached the classroom.

"Farewell!" cried the knight, popping his head into a painting of some sinister-looking monks. "Farewell, my comrades-in-arms! If ever you have need of noble heart and steely sinew, call upon Sir Cadogan!"

"Yeah, we'll call you," muttered Ron as the knight disappeared, "if we ever need someone mental."

They climbed the last few steps and emerged onto a tiny landing, where most of the class was already assembled. There were no doors off this landing, but Ron nudged Harry and pointed at the ceiling, where there was a circular trapdoor with a brass plaque on it.

"Sybill Trelawney, Divination teacher," Harry read. "How're

we supposed to get up there?"

As though in answer to his question, the trapdoor suddenly opened, and a silvery ladder descended right at Harry's feet. Everyone got quiet.

"After you," said Ron, grinning, so Harry climbed the ladder first.

He emerged into the strangest-looking classroom he had ever seen. In fact, it didn't look like a classroom at all, more like a cross between someone's attic and an old-fashioned tea shop. At least twenty small, circular tables were crammed inside it, all surrounded by chintz armchairs and fat little poufs. Everything was lit with a dim, crimson light; the curtains at the windows were all closed, and the many lamps were draped with dark red scarves. It was stiflingly warm, and the fire that was burning under the crowded mantelpiece was giving off a heavy, sickly sort of perfume as it heated a large copper kettle. The shelves running around the circular walls were crammed with dusty-looking feathers, stubs of candles, many packs of tattered playing cards, countless silvery crystal balls, and a huge array of teacups.

Ron appeared at Harry's shoulder as the class assembled around them, all talking in whispers.

"Where is she?" Ron said.

A voice came suddenly out of the shadows, a soft, misty sort of voice.

"Welcome," it said. "How nice to see you in the physical world at last."

Harry's immediate impression was of a large, glittering insect. Professor Trelawney moved into the firelight, and they saw that she

was very thin; her large glasses magnified her eyes to several times their natural size, and she was draped in a gauzy spangled shawl. Innumerable chains and beads hung around her spindly neck, and her arms and hands were encrusted with bangles and rings.

“Sit, my children, sit,” she said, and they all climbed awkwardly into armchairs or sank onto poufs. Harry, Ron, and Hermione sat themselves around the same round table.

“Welcome to Divination,” said Professor Trelawney, who had seated herself in a winged armchair in front of the fire. “My name is Professor Trelawney. You may not have seen me before. I find that descending too often into the hustle and bustle of the main school clouds my Inner Eye.”

Nobody said anything to this extraordinary pronouncement. Professor Trelawney delicately rearranged her shawl and continued, “So you have chosen to study Divination, the most difficult of all magical arts. I must warn you at the outset that if you do not have the Sight, there is very little I will be able to teach you. Books can take you only so far in this field. . . .”

At these words, both Harry and Ron glanced, grinning, at Hermione, who looked startled at the news that books wouldn't be much help in this subject.

“Many witches and wizards, talented though they are in the area of loud bangs and smells and sudden disappearings, are yet unable to penetrate the veiled mysteries of the future,” Professor Trelawney went on, her enormous, gleaming eyes moving from face to nervous face. “It is a Gift granted to few. You, boy,” she said suddenly to Neville, who almost toppled off his pouf. “Is your grandmother

well?"

"I think so," said Neville tremulously.

"I wouldn't be so sure if I were you, dear," said Professor Trelawney, the firelight glinting on her long emerald earrings. Neville gulped. Professor Trelawney continued placidly. "We will be covering the basic methods of Divination this year. The first term will be devoted to reading the tea leaves. Next term we shall progress to palmistry. By the way, my dear," she shot suddenly at Parvati Patil, "beware a red-haired man."

Parvati gave a startled look at Ron, who was right behind her, and edged her chair away from him.

"In the second term," Professor Trelawney went on, "we shall progress to the crystal ball — if we have finished with fire omens, that is. Unfortunately, classes will be disrupted in February by a nasty bout of flu. I myself will lose my voice. And around Easter, one of our number will leave us forever."

A very tense silence followed this pronouncement, but Professor Trelawney seemed unaware of it.

"I wonder, dear," she said to Lavender Brown, who was nearest and shrank back in her chair, "if you could pass me the largest silver teapot?"

Lavender, looking relieved, stood up, took an enormous teapot from the shelf, and put it down on the table in front of Professor Trelawney.

"Thank you, my dear. Incidentally, that thing you are dreading — it will happen on Friday the sixteenth of October."

Lavender trembled.

“Now, I want you all to divide into pairs. Collect a teacup from the shelf, come to me, and I will fill it. Then sit down and drink, drink until only the dregs remain. Swill these around the cup three times with the left hand, then turn the cup upside down on its saucer, wait for the last of the tea to drain away, then give your cup to your partner to read. You will interpret the patterns using pages five and six of *Unfogging the Future*. I shall move among you, helping and instructing. Oh, and dear” — she caught Neville by the arm as he made to stand up — “after you’ve broken your first cup, would you be so kind as to select one of the blue-patterned ones? I’m rather attached to the pink.”

Sure enough, Neville had no sooner reached the shelf of teacups when there was a tinkle of breaking china. Professor Trelawney swept over to him holding a dustpan and brush and said, “One of the blue ones, then, dear, if you wouldn’t mind . . . thank you. . . .”

When Harry and Ron had had their teacups filled, they went back to their table and tried to drink the scalding tea quickly. They swilled the dregs around as Professor Trelawney had instructed, then drained the cups and swapped them.

“Right,” said Ron as they both opened their books at pages five and six. “What can you see in mine?”

“A load of soggy brown stuff,” said Harry. The heavily perfumed smoke in the room was making him feel sleepy and stupid.

“Broaden your minds, my dears, and allow your eyes to see past the mundane!” Professor Trelawney cried through the gloom.

Harry tried to pull himself together.

“Right, you’ve got a crooked sort of cross . . .” He consulted

Unfogging the Future. “That means you’re going to have ‘trials and suffering’ = sorry about that = but there’s a thing that could be the sun . . . hang on . . . that means ‘great happiness’ . . . so you’re going to suffer but be very happy. . . .”

“You need your Inner Eye tested, if you ask me,” said Ron, and they both had to stifle their laughs as Professor Trelawney gazed in their direction.

“My turn . . .” Ron peered into Harry’s teacup, his forehead wrinkled with effort. “There’s a blob a bit like a bowler hat,” he said. “Maybe you’re going to work for the Ministry of Magic. . . .”

He turned the teacup the other way up.

“But this way it looks more like an acorn. . . . What’s that?” He scanned his copy of *Unfogging the Future*. ““A windfall, unexpected gold.’ Excellent, you can lend me some . . . and there’s a thing here,” he turned the cup again, “that looks like an animal . . . yeah, if that was its head . . . it looks like a hippo . . . no, a sheep . . .”

Professor Trelawney whirled around as Harry let out a snort of laughter.

“Let me see that, my dear,” she said reprovingly to Ron, sweeping over and snatching Harry’s cup from him. Everyone went quiet to watch.

Professor Trelawney was staring into the teacup, rotating it counterclockwise.

“The falcon . . . my dear, you have a deadly enemy.”

“But everyone knows *that*,” said Hermione in a loud whisper. Professor Trelawney stared at her.

“Well, they do,” said Hermione. “Everybody knows about Harry

and You-Know-Who.”

Harry and Ron stared at her with a mixture of amazement and admiration. They had never heard Hermione speak to a teacher like that before. Professor Trelawney chose not to reply. She lowered her huge eyes to Harry’s cup again and continued to turn it.

“The club . . . an attack. Dear, dear, this is not a happy cup. . . .”

“I thought that was a bowler hat,” said Ron sheepishly.

“The skull . . . danger in your path, my dear. . . .”

Everyone was staring, transfixed, at Professor Trelawney, who gave the cup a final turn, gasped, and then screamed.

There was another tinkle of breaking china; Neville had smashed his second cup. Professor Trelawney sank into a vacant armchair, her glittering hand at her heart and her eyes closed.

“My dear boy . . . my poor, dear boy . . . no . . . it is kinder not to say . . . no . . . don’t ask me. . . .”

“What is it, Professor?” said Dean Thomas at once. Everyone had got to their feet, and slowly they crowded around Harry and Ron’s table, pressing close to Professor Trelawney’s chair to get a good look at Harry’s cup.

“My dear,” Professor Trelawney’s huge eyes opened dramatically, “you have the Grim.”

“The what?” said Harry.

He could tell that he wasn’t the only one who didn’t understand; Dean Thomas shrugged at him and Lavender Brown looked puzzled, but nearly everybody else clapped their hands to their mouths in horror.

“The Grim, my dear, the Grim!” cried Professor Trelawney, who

looked shocked that Harry hadn't understood. "The giant, spectral dog that haunts churchyards! My dear boy, it is an omen — the worst omen — of *death*!"

Harry's stomach lurched. That dog on the cover of *Death Omens* in Flourish and Blotts — the dog in the shadows of Magnolia Crescent . . . Lavender Brown clapped her hands to her mouth too. Everyone was looking at Harry, everyone except Hermione, who had gotten up and moved around to the back of Professor Trelawney's chair.

"I don't think it looks like a Grim," she said flatly.

Professor Trelawney surveyed Hermione with mounting dislike.

"You'll forgive me for saying so, my dear, but I perceive very little aura around you. Very little receptivity to the resonances of the future."

Seamus Finnigan was tilting his head from side to side.

"It looks like a Grim if you do this," he said, with his eyes almost shut, "but it looks more like a donkey from here," he said, leaning to the left.

"When you've all finished deciding whether I'm going to die or not!" said Harry, taking even himself by surprise. Now nobody seemed to want to look at him.

"I think we will leave the lesson here for today," said Professor Trelawney in her mistiest voice. "Yes . . . please pack away your things. . . ."

Silently the class took their teacups back to Professor Trelawney, packed away their books, and closed their bags. Even Ron was avoiding Harry's eyes.

“Until we meet again,” said Professor Trelawney faintly, “fair fortune be yours. Oh, and dear” — she pointed at Neville — “you’ll be late next time, so mind you work extra-hard to catch up.”

Harry, Ron, and Hermione descended Professor Trelawney’s ladder and the winding stair in silence, then set off for Professor McGonagall’s Transfiguration lesson. It took them so long to find her classroom that, early as they had left Divination, they were only just in time.

Harry chose a seat right at the back of the room, feeling as though he were sitting in a very bright spotlight; the rest of the class kept shooting furtive glances at him, as though he were about to drop dead at any moment. He hardly heard what Professor McGonagall was telling them about Animagi (wizards who could transform at will into animals), and wasn’t even watching when she transformed herself in front of their eyes into a tabby cat with spectacle markings around her eyes.

“Really, what has got into you all today?” said Professor McGonagall, turning back into herself with a faint *pop*, and staring around at them all. “Not that it matters, but that’s the first time my transformation’s not got applause from a class.”

Everybody’s heads turned toward Harry again, but nobody spoke. Then Hermione raised her hand.

“Please, Professor, we’ve just had our first Divination class, and we were reading the tea leaves, and —”

“Ah, of course,” said Professor McGonagall, suddenly frowning. “There is no need to say any more, Miss Granger. Tell me, which of you will be dying this year?”

Everyone stared at her.

“Me,” said Harry, finally.

“I see,” said Professor McGonagall, fixing Harry with her beady eyes. “Then you should know, Potter, that Sybill Trelawney has predicted the death of one student a year since she arrived at this school. None of them has died yet. Seeing death omens is her favorite way of greeting a new class. If it were not for the fact that I never speak ill of my colleagues —”

Professor McGonagall broke off, and they saw that her nostrils had gone white. She went on, more calmly, “Divination is one of the most imprecise branches of magic. I shall not conceal from you that I have very little patience with it. True Seers are very rare, and Professor Trelawney —”

She stopped again, and then said, in a very matter-of-fact tone, “You look in excellent health to me, Potter, so you will excuse me if I don’t let you off homework today. I assure you that if you die, you need not hand it in.”

Hermione laughed. Harry felt a bit better. It was harder to feel scared of a lump of tea leaves away from the dim red light and befuddling perfume of Professor Trelawney’s classroom. Not everyone was convinced, however. Ron still looked worried, and Lavender whispered, “But what about Neville’s cup?”

When the Transfiguration class had finished, they joined the crowd thundering toward the Great Hall for lunch.

“Ron, cheer up,” said Hermione, pushing a dish of stew toward him. “You heard what Professor McGonagall said.”

Ron spooned stew onto his plate and picked up his fork but didn’t

start.

“Harry,” he said, in a low, serious voice, “you *haven't* seen a great black dog anywhere, have you?”

“Yeah, I have,” said Harry. “I saw one the night I left the Dursleys’.”

Ron let his fork fall with a clatter.

“Probably a stray,” said Hermione calmly.

Ron looked at Hermione as though she had gone mad.

“Hermione, if Harry’s seen a Grim, that’s — that’s bad,” he said. “My — my uncle Bilius saw one and — and he died twenty-four hours later!”

“Coincidence,” said Hermione airily, pouring herself some pumpkin juice.

“You don’t know what you’re talking about!” said Ron, starting to get angry. “Grims scare the living daylights out of most wizards!”

“There you are, then,” said Hermione in a superior tone. “They see the Grim and die of fright. The Grim’s not an omen, it’s the cause of death! And Harry’s still with us because he’s not stupid enough to see one and think, right, well, I’d better kick the bucket then!”

Ron mouthed wordlessly at Hermione, who opened her bag, took out her new Arithmancy book, and propped it open against the juice jug.

“I think Divination seems very woolly,” she said, searching for her page. “A lot of guesswork, if you ask me.”

“There was nothing woolly about the Grim in that cup!” said Ron hotly.

“You didn’t seem quite so confident when you were telling Harry

it was a sheep," said Hermione coolly.

"Professor Trelawney said you didn't have the right aura! You just don't like being bad at something for a change!"

He had touched a nerve. Hermione slammed her Arithmancy book down on the table so hard that bits of meat and carrot flew everywhere.

"If being good at Divination means I have to pretend to see death omens in a lump of tea leaves, I'm not sure I'll be studying it much longer! That lesson was absolute rubbish compared with my Arithmancy class!"

She snatched up her bag and stalked away.

Ron frowned after her.

"What's she talking about?" he said to Harry. "She hasn't been to an Arithmancy class yet."

Harry was pleased to get out of the castle after lunch. Yesterday's rain had cleared; the sky was a clear, pale gray, and the grass was springy and damp underfoot as they set off for their first-ever Care of Magical Creatures class.

Ron and Hermione weren't speaking to each other. Harry walked beside them in silence as they went down the sloping lawns to Hagrid's hut on the edge of the Forbidden Forest. It was only when he spotted three only-too-familiar backs ahead of them that he realized they must be having these lessons with the Slytherins. Malfoy was talking animatedly to Crabbe and Goyle, who were chortling. Harry was quite sure he knew what they were talking about.

Hagrid was waiting for his class at the door of his hut. He stood in his moleskin overcoat, with Fang the boarhound at his heels, looking impatient to start.

“C’mon, now, get a move on!” he called as the class approached. “Got a real treat for yeh today! Great lesson comin’ up! Everyone here? Right, follow me!”

For one nasty moment, Harry thought that Hagrid was going to lead them into the forest; Harry had had enough unpleasant experiences in there to last him a lifetime. However, Hagrid strolled off around the edge of the trees, and five minutes later, they found themselves outside a kind of paddock. There was nothing in there.

“Everyone gather ’round the fence here!” he called. “That’s it — make sure yeh can see — now, firs’ thing yeh’ll want ter do is open yer books —”

“How?” said the cold, drawling voice of Draco Malfoy.

“Eh?” said Hagrid.

“How do we open our books?” Malfoy repeated. He took out his copy of *The Monster Book of Monsters*, which he had bound shut with a length of rope. Other people took theirs out too; some, like Harry, had belted their book shut; others had crammed them inside tight bags or clamped them together with binder clips.

“Hasn’ — hasn’ anyone bin able ter open their books?” said Hagrid, looking crestfallen.

The class all shook their heads.

“Yeh’ve got ter *stroke* ’em,” said Hagrid, as though this was the most obvious thing in the world. “Look —”

He took Hermione’s copy and ripped off the Spellotape that bound

it. The book tried to bite, but Hagrid ran a giant forefinger down its spine, and the book shivered, and then fell open and lay quiet in his hand.

“Oh, how silly we’ve all been!” Malfoy sneered. “We should have *stroked* them! Why didn’t we guess!”

“I — I thought they were funny,” Hagrid said uncertainly to Hermione.

“Oh, tremendously funny!” said Malfoy. “Really witty, giving us books that try and rip our hands off!”

“Shut up, Malfoy,” said Harry quietly. Hagrid was looking downcast and Harry wanted Hagrid’s first lesson to be a success.

“Righ’ then,” said Hagrid, who seemed to have lost his thread, “so — so yeh’ve got yer books an’ — an’ — now yeh need the Magical Creatures. Yeah. So I’ll go an’ get ’em. Hang on . . .”

He strode away from them into the forest and out of sight.

“God, this place is going to the dogs,” said Malfoy loudly. “That oaf teaching classes, my father’ll have a fit when I tell him —”

“Shut up, Malfoy,” Harry repeated.

“Careful, Potter, there’s a dementor behind you —”

“Oooooooh!” squealed Lavender Brown, pointing toward the opposite side of the paddock.

Trotting toward them were a dozen of the most bizarre creatures Harry had ever seen. They had the bodies, hind legs, and tails of horses, but the front legs, wings, and heads of what seemed to be giant eagles, with cruel, steel-colored beaks and large, brilliantly orange eyes. The talons on their front legs were half a foot long and deadly looking. Each of the beasts had a thick leather collar around

its neck, which was attached to a long chain, and the ends of all of these were held in the vast hands of Hagrid, who came jogging into the paddock behind the creatures.

“Gee up, there!” he roared, shaking the chains and urging the creatures toward the fence where the class stood. Everyone drew back slightly as Hagrid reached them and tethered the creatures to the fence.

“Hippogriffs!” Hagrid roared happily, waving a hand at them. “Beau’iful, aren’ they?”

Harry could sort of see what Hagrid meant. Once you got over the first shock of seeing something that was half horse, half bird, you started to appreciate the hippogriffs’ gleaming coats, changing smoothly from feather to hair, each of them a different color: stormy gray, bronze, pinkish roan, gleaming chestnut, and inky black.

“So,” said Hagrid, rubbing his hands together and beaming around, “if yeh wan’ ter come a bit nearer —”

No one seemed to want to. Harry, Ron, and Hermione, however, approached the fence cautiously.

“Now, firs’ thing yeh gotta know abou’ hippogriffs is, they’re proud,” said Hagrid. “Easily offended, hippogriffs are. Don’t never insult one, ’cause it might be the last thing yeh do.”

Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle weren’t listening; they were talking in an undertone and Harry had a nasty feeling they were plotting how best to disrupt the lesson.

“Yeh always wait fer the hippogriff ter make the firs’ move,” Hagrid continued. “It’s polite, see? Yeh walk toward him, and yeh bow, an’ yeh wait. If he bows back, yeh’re allowed ter touch him. If

he doesn't bow, then get away from him sharpish, 'cause those talons hurt.

"Right — who wants ter go first?"

Most of the class backed farther away in answer. Even Harry, Ron, and Hermione had misgivings. The hippogriffs were tossing their fierce heads and flexing their powerful wings; they didn't seem to like being tethered like this.

"No one?" said Hagrid, with a pleading look.

"I'll do it," said Harry.

There was an intake of breath from behind him, and both Lavender and Parvati whispered, "Oooh, no, Harry, remember your tea leaves!"

Harry ignored them. He climbed over the paddock fence.

"Good man, Harry!" roared Hagrid. "Right then — let's see how yeh get on with Buckbeak."

He untied one of the chains, pulled the gray hippogriff away from its fellows, and slipped off its leather collar. The class on the other side of the paddock seemed to be holding its breath. Malfoy's eyes were narrowed maliciously.

"Easy, now, Harry," said Hagrid quietly. "Yeh've got eye contact, now try not ter blink. . . . Hippogriffs don't trust yeh if yeh blink too much. . . ."

Harry's eyes immediately began to water, but he didn't shut them. Buckbeak had turned his great, sharp head and was staring at Harry with one fierce orange eye.

"Tha's it," said Hagrid. "Tha's it, Harry . . . now, bow . . ."

Harry didn't feel much like exposing the back of his neck to

Buckbeak, but he did as he was told. He gave a short bow and then looked up.

The hippogriff was still staring haughtily at him. It didn't move.

"Ah," said Hagrid, sounding worried. "Right — back away, now, Harry, easy does it —"

But then, to Harry's enormous surprise, the hippogriff suddenly bent its scaly front knees and sank into what was an unmistakable bow.

"Well done, Harry!" said Hagrid, ecstatic. "Right — yeh can touch him! Pat his beak, go on!"

Feeling that a better reward would have been to back away, Harry moved slowly toward the hippogriff and reached out toward it. He patted the beak several times and the hippogriff closed its eyes lazily, as though enjoying it.

The class broke into applause, all except for Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle, who were looking deeply disappointed.

"Righ' then, Harry," said Hagrid. "I reckon he might' let yeh ride him!"

This was more than Harry had bargained for. He was used to a broomstick, but he wasn't sure a hippogriff would be quite the same.

"Yeh climb up there, jus' behind the wing joint," said Hagrid, "an' mind yeh don' pull any of his feathers out, he won' like that. . . ."

Harry put his foot on the top of Buckbeak's wing and hoisted himself onto its back. Buckbeak stood up. Harry wasn't sure where to hold on; everything in front of him was covered with feathers.

"Go on, then!" roared Hagrid, slapping the hippogriff's hindquarters.

Without warning, twelve-foot wings flapped open on either side of Harry; he just had time to seize the hippogriff around the neck before he was soaring upward. It was nothing like a broomstick, and Harry knew which one he preferred; the hippogriff's wings beat uncomfortably on either side of him, catching him under his legs and making him feel he was about to be thrown off; the glossy feathers slipped under his fingers and he didn't dare get a stronger grip; instead of the smooth action of his Nimbus Two Thousand, he now felt himself rocking backward and forward as the hindquarters of the hippogriff rose and fell with its wings.

Buckbeak flew him once around the paddock and then headed back to the ground; this was the bit Harry had been dreading; he leaned back as the smooth neck lowered, feeling he was going to slip off over the beak, then felt a heavy thud as the four ill-assorted feet hit the ground. He just managed to hold on and push himself straight again.

"Good work, Harry!" roared Hagrid as everyone except Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle cheered. "Okay, who else wants a go?"

Emboldened by Harry's success, the rest of the class climbed cautiously into the paddock. Hagrid untied the hippogriffs one by one, and soon people were bowing nervously, all over the paddock. Neville ran repeatedly backward from his, which didn't seem to want to bend its knees. Ron and Hermione practiced on the chestnut, while Harry watched.

Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle had taken over Buckbeak. He had bowed to Malfoy, who was now patting his beak, looking disdainful.

"This is very easy," Malfoy drawled, loud enough for Harry to

hear him. "I knew it must have been, if Potter could do it. . . . I bet you're not dangerous at all, are you?" he said to the hippogriff. "Are you, you great ugly brute?"

It happened in a flash of steely talons; Malfoy let out a high-pitched scream and next moment, Hagrid was wrestling Buckbeak back into his collar as he strained to get at Malfoy, who lay curled in the grass, blood blossoming over his robes.

"I'm dying!" Malfoy yelled as the class panicked. "I'm dying, look at me! It's killed me!"

"Yer not dyin'!" said Hagrid, who had gone very white. "Someone help me — gotta get him outta here —"

Hermione ran to hold open the gate as Hagrid lifted Malfoy easily. As they passed, Harry saw that there was a long, deep gash on Malfoy's arm; blood splattered the grass and Hagrid ran with him, up the slope toward the castle.

Very shaken, the Care of Magical Creatures class followed at a walk. The Slytherins were all shouting about Hagrid.

"They should fire him straight away!" said Pansy Parkinson, who was in tears.

"It was Malfoy's fault!" snapped Dean Thomas. Crabbe and Goyle flexed their muscles threateningly.

They all climbed the stone steps into the deserted entrance hall.

"I'm going to see if he's okay!" said Pansy, and they all watched her run up the marble staircase. The Slytherins, still muttering about Hagrid, headed away in the direction of their dungeon common room; Harry, Ron, and Hermione proceeded upstairs to Gryffindor Tower.

"D'you think he'll be all right?" said Hermione nervously.

“Course he will. Madam Pomfrey can mend cuts in about a second,” said Harry, who had had far worse injuries mended magically by the nurse.

“That was a really bad thing to happen in Hagrid’s first class, though, wasn’t it?” said Ron, looking worried. “Trust Malfoy to mess things up for him . . .”

They were among the first to reach the Great Hall at dinnertime, hoping to see Hagrid, but he wasn’t there.

“They *wouldn’t* fire him, would they?” said Hermione anxiously, not touching her steak-and-kidney pudding.

“They’d better not,” said Ron, who wasn’t eating either.

Harry was watching the Slytherin table. A large group including Crabbe and Goyle was huddled together, deep in conversation. Harry was sure they were cooking up their own version of how Malfoy had been injured.

“Well, you can’t say it wasn’t an interesting first day back,” said Ron gloomily.

They went up to the crowded Gryffindor common room after dinner and tried to do the homework Professor McGonagall had given them, but all three of them kept breaking off and glancing out of the tower window.

“There’s a light on in Hagrid’s window,” Harry said suddenly.

Ron looked at his watch.

“If we hurried, we could go down and see him. It’s still quite early. . . .”

“I don’t know,” Hermione said slowly, and Harry saw her glance at him.

“I’m allowed to walk across the *grounds*,” he said, pointedly. “Sirius Black hasn’t got past the dementors here, has he?”

So they put their things away and headed out of the portrait hole, glad not to meet anybody on their way to the front doors, as they weren’t entirely sure they were supposed to be out.

The grass was still wet and looked almost black in the twilight. When they reached Hagrid’s hut, they knocked, and a voice growled, “C’min.”

Hagrid was sitting in his shirtsleeves at his scrubbed wooden table; his boarhound, Fang, had his head in Hagrid’s lap. One look told them that Hagrid had been drinking a lot; there was a pewter tankard almost as big as a bucket in front of him, and he seemed to be having difficulty getting them into focus.

“Spect it’s a record,” he said thickly, when he recognized them. “Don’ reckon they’ve ever had a teacher who lasted on’y a day before.”

“You haven’t been fired, Hagrid!” gasped Hermione.

“Not yet,” said Hagrid miserably, taking a huge gulp of whatever was in the tankard. “But ’s only a matter o’ time, i’n’t it, after Malfoy . . .”

“How is he?” said Ron as they all sat down. “It wasn’t serious, was it?”

“Madam Pomfrey fixed him best she could,” said Hagrid dully, “but he’s sayin’ it’s still agony . . . covered in bandages . . . moanin’ . . .”

“He’s faking it,” said Harry at once. “Madam Pomfrey can mend anything. She regrew half my bones last year. Trust Malfoy to milk it

for all it's worth."

"School gov'nors have bin told, o' course," said Hagrid miserably. "They reckon I started too big. Shoulda left hippogriffs fer later . . . done flobberworms or summat. . . . Jus' thought it'd make a good firs' lesson. . . . 'S all my fault. . . ."

"It's all *Malfoy's* fault, Hagrid!" said Hermione earnestly.

"We're witnesses," said Harry. "You said hippogriffs attack if you insult them. It's Malfoy's problem that he wasn't listening. We'll tell Dumbledore what really happened."

"Yeah, don't worry, Hagrid, we'll back you up," said Ron.

Tears leaked out of the crinkled corners of Hagrid's beetle-black eyes. He grabbed both Harry and Ron and pulled them into a bone-breaking hug.

"I think you've had enough to drink, Hagrid," said Hermione firmly. She took the tankard from the table and went outside to empty it.

"Ar, maybe she's right," said Hagrid, letting go of Harry and Ron, who both staggered away, rubbing their ribs. Hagrid heaved himself out of his chair and followed Hermione unsteadily outside. They heard a loud splash.

"What's he done?" said Harry nervously as Hermione came back in with the empty tankard.

"Stuck his head in the water barrel," said Hermione, putting the tankard away.

Hagrid came back, his long hair and beard sopping wet, wiping the water out of his eyes.

"Tha's better," he said, shaking his head like a dog and drenching

them all. "Listen, it was good of yeh ter come an' see me, I really —"

Hagrid stopped dead, staring at Harry as though he'd only just realized he was there.

"WHAT D'YEH THINK YOU'RE DOIN', EH?" he roared, so suddenly that they jumped a foot in the air. "YEH'RE NOT TO GO WANDERIN' AROUND AFTER DARK, HARRY! AN' YOU TWO! LETTIN' HIM!"

Hagrid strode over to Harry, grabbed his arm, and pulled him to the door.

"C'mon!" Hagrid said angrily. "I'm takin' yer all back up ter school, an' don' let me catch yeh walkin' down ter see me after dark again. I'm not worth that!"

Kloue en Teeblare

Toe Harry, Ron en Hermien die volgende oggend vir ontbyt na die Groot Saal gaan, is die eerste ding wat hulle sien Draco Malfoy, wat lyk of hy 'n baie snaakse storie aan 'n groot groep Slibberins vertel. Toe hulle verbystap, gee Malfoy 'n verspotte nabootsing van hoe iemand in 'n beswyming neersyg, en 'n brullende gelag klink op.

"Ignoreer hom," sê Hermien wat reg agter Harry is. "Ignoreer hom net, dis nie werd om . . ."

"Haai, Potter!" skree Pansy Parkinson, 'n Slibberinmeisie met 'n gesig soos 'n mopshond. "Potter! Die Dementors kom, Potter! *Hoeeeee!*"

Harry val neer op 'n stoel by die Griffindortafel, reg langs George Weasley.

"Nuwe lesroosters vir derdejaars," sê George en gee dit aan. "Wat gaan met jou aan, Harry?"

"Malfoy," sê Ron wat aan George se ander kant gaan sit het en na die Slibberintafel gluur.

George kyk op, net betyds om te sien hoe Malfoy weer eens maak of hy flou val van vrees.

"Daardie klein twak," sê hy bedaar. "Hy was nie gisteraand so astrant toe die Dementors aan ons kant van die trein was nie. Het by ons kompartement ingehol gekom, nè, Fred?"

"Homself omtrent natgemaak," sê Fred met 'n minagtende blik na Malfoy.

"Ek was ook nie alte vrolik nie," sê George. "Hulle is vieslike goed, daardie Dementors . . ."

"Laat jou binnegoed soort van vries, nè," sê Fred.

"Julle het darem nie flou geword nie, het julle?" sê Harry in 'n gedempte stem.

"Vergeet daarvan, Harry," sê George ferm. "Pa moes eenkeer na Azkaban gaan, onthou jy, Fred? Hy't gesê dit was die aakligste plek waar hy nog ooit was. Hy't van sy kop tot sy tone gebewe toe hy teruggekom het . . . Hulle suig al die vreugde uit 'n plek, daardie Dementors. Die meeste van die gevangenes gaan van hul koppe af."

"In elk geval, ons sal sien hoe in sy skik Malfoy na ons eerste Kwiddiek-wedstryd is," sê Fred. "Griffindor teen Slibberin, die eerste wedstryd van die seisoen, onthou?"

Die enigste keer dat Harry en Malfoy teen mekaar in 'n Kwiddiek-wedstryd gespeel het, het Malfoy lelik tweede gekom. Harry voel effens beter en help homself aan worsies en gebakte tamaties.

Hermien bestudeer haar nuwe lesrooster.

"O, lekker, ons begin vandag met van ons nuwe vakke," sê sy tevrede.

"Hermien," sê Ron, terwyl hy fronsend oor haar skouer kyk, "hulle het 'n gemors van jou rooster gemaak. Kyk – hulle't jou op vir omtrent tien vakke elke dag. Daar is nie genoeg tyd nie."

"Ek sal regkom. Ek het dit met professor McGonagall bespreek."

"Maar kyk daar," sê Ron en hy lag, "kyk by vanoggend: Nege-uur, Waarsêery. En daaronder, nege-uur, Moggelstudies. En –" Ron leun ongelowig nader aan die rooster, "kyk – onder dit, Rekenmatiek, *nege-uur*. Ek bedoel, ek weet jy is goed, Hermien, maar niemand is so goed nie. Hoe gaan jy miskien gelyk by drie klasse wees?"

"Moenie simpel wees nie," sê Hermien kortaf. "Natuurlik kan ek nie gelyktydig by drie klasse wees nie."

"Maar hoe –"

"Gee asseblief die marmelade aan," sê Hermien.

"Maar –"

"Ag, Ron, wat het dit met jou uit te waai as my rooster 'n bietjie vol is?" snou Hermien hom toe. "Ek sê jou mos, ek het alles met professor McGonagall bespreek."

Net toe kom Hagrid die Groot Saal binne. Hy dra sy lang molveloorjas en swaai 'n dooie muishond ingedagte aan die stert rond.

"Alles reg?" vra hy gretig en steek 'n oomblik vas op pad na die personeeltafel. "Julle's in my heel eerste klas! Net na middagete! Is al van vyfuur af op om alles reg te maak . . . hoop dis oukei . . . ek, 'n onderwyser . . . bid jou aan . . ."

Hy grinnik breed vir hulle en sit af na die personeeltafel, die muishond nog steeds swaaiend in sy hand.

"Wonder wat hy vir ons reggemaak het?" sê Ron en daar is 'n titteltjie aangs in sy stem.

Die saal is besig om leeg te loop soos die mense na hul eerste klasse gaan. Ron kyk na sy lesrooster.

"Ons moet gou maak, Waarsêery is heel bo in die Noordtoring. Dit gaan ons 'n goeie tien minute vat om daar te kom."

Hulle eet hul ontbyt haastig klaar, sê tot siens vir Fred en George en stap terug deur die saal. Toe hulle verby die Slibberintafel stap, maak Malfoy nog 'n keer of hy flou val. 'n Geskater volg Harry tot in die ingangsportaal.

Dis 'n lang ent deur die kasteel na die Noordtoring. Tydens hul twee jaar by Hogwarts het hulle nog nie alles oor die kasteel geleer nie, en hulle was nog nooit levore in die Noordtoring nie.

“Daar – moet – 'n – kortpad – wees,” hyg Ron toe hulle die sewende lang stel trappe uitklim en op 'n onbekende trappoortaal beland waar daar niks anders is as 'n groot skildery van 'n barre, uitgestrekte grasveld wat teen die klipmuur hang nie.

“Ek dink dis hierdie kant toe,” sê Hermien en kyk regs af in die leë gang.

“Kan nie wees nie,” sê Ron. “Dit is suid. Kyk, jy kan 'n deel van die meer deur die venster sien . . .”

Harry kyk na die skildery. 'n Vet, skimmelgrys ponie het so pas op die grasveld aangestap gekom en staan rustig en wei. Harry is gewoond daaraan dat die onderwerpe van Hogwarts-skilderye rondbeweeg en dikwels hul rame verlaat om by mekaar te gaan kuier, maar dis altyd vir hom lekker om na hulle te kyk. 'n Oomblik later kom 'n kort, gesette ridder in 'n wapenrusting die prent klaterend binne, agter sy ponie aan. Aan die grasvlekke op sy metaalknieë is dit duidelik dat hy afgeval het.

“Aha!” gil hy toe hy vir Harry, Ron en Hermien sien. “Watter skurke oortree hier op my privaat grond! Kom julle my altemit spot omdat ek afgeval het? Uit met jul swaarde, skobbejakke, honde!”

Hulle kyk verbaas hoe die klein riddertjie sy swaard uit sy skede trek en dit woes heen en weer swaai terwyl hy van woede op en af spring. Die swaard is egter te lank vir hom; 'n besonder wilde swaaihou laat hom sy balans verloor en gesig eerste op die gras beland.

“Het jy seergekry?” vra Harry en beweeg nader aan die prent.

“Gee pad, jou smerige windsak! Staan terug, skelm!”

Weer gryp die ridder sy swaard en gebruik dit om homself van die grond af op te stoot, maar die lem sink diep in die gras weg, en hoewel hy met al sy mag daaraan trek, kry hy dit nie weer uit nie. Uiteindelik val hy op die gras neer en stoot sy visier op om sy natgeswete gesig af te vee.

“Luister,” sê Harry, in 'n poging om die ridder se blaaskans te benut, “ons soek die Noordtoring. Jy weet nie dalk hoe om daar te kom nie?”

“'n Soekopdrag.” Dit lyk of die ridder se woede oombliklik bedaar. Hy kom kletterend orent en skree, “Volg my, liewe vriende, en ons sal ons doel bereik, of dapper omkom in die stryd!”

Hy trek vir oulaas vrugteloos aan sy swaard, probeer vergeefs om op die vet ponie te klouter en skree, “Te voet dan, goeie here en edele dame! Voorwaarts! Voorwaarts!”

Toe hardloop hy klaterend by die linkerkant van die raam uit en verdwyn buite sig.

Hulle sit hom agterna, al met die gang af, en volg die geluid van sy wa-

inrustring. Elke nou en dan sien hulle hom waar hy deur 'n prent voor hulle hardloop.

"Wees moedig en dapper van gees, die ergste kom nog!" gil die ridder, en hulle sien hom voor 'n ontstelde groep vroue in krinoliene verskyn, wie se portret teen die muur van 'n smal wenteltrap hang.

Harry, Ron en Hermien klim die steil wenteltrap al blasend uit; hulle word dronker en dronker in die kop, tot hulle uiteindelik 'n gemurmel van stemme bo hulle hoor en besef dat hulle by die klaskamer is.

"Vaarwel!" roep die ridder en steek sy kop in 'n skildery van 'n groep monnike wat uiters somber lyk. "Vaarwel, my kamerade! As julle ooit weer 'n edele hart en senuwees van staal benodig, vra net vir sir Cado-gan!"

"Ja, ons sal jou roep," mompel Ron toe die ridder verdwyn, "as ons ooit 'n malle nodig het."

Hulle klim die laaste paar trappe tot by 'n klein trapportaal waar die grootste deel van die klas reeds bymekaar is. Geen deure lei uit hierdie trapportaal nie; Ron stamp aan Harry en wys na die plafon waarin daar 'n ronde valdeur met 'n koperplaat op is.

"Sybill Trelawney, Waarsêery," lees Harry. "Hoe moet ons daar kom?"

Asof in antwoord op sy vraag, gaan die valdeur skielik oop en 'n silwer leer sak af tot op Harry se voete. Almal word stil.

"Na jou," sê Ron grinnikend, en Harry klim eerste teen die leer op.

Hy kom in die snaaksste klaskamer wat hy nog ooit gesien het. Dit lyk, om die waarheid te sê, glad nie na 'n klaskamer nie; meer soos 'n kruis tussen iemand se solder en 'n outydse teewinkel. Minstens twintig klein, ronde tafeltjies is daar binne ingedruk; almal is omring deur leunstoel wat met sis oorgetrek is en dikgestopte voetstoeltjies. Alles word deur 'n dowwe karmosynrooi lig verlig; al die gordyne voor die vensters is toegetrek, en die lampe is in rooi serpe gedrapeer. Dit is bedompig warm, en die vuur wat onder die volgepakte kaggelrak brand, veroorsaak 'n swaar, walglike reuk terwyl dit die groot koperketel verwarm. Die rakke om die sirkelvormige mure is vol stowwerige vere, stukkie kerse, talle verweerde pakke speelkaarte, 'n menigte kristalballes en 'n groot verskeidenheid teekopies.

Ron staan by Harry se skouer toe die klas om hulle versamel; almal fluister.

"Waar is sy?" vra Ron.

'n Stem kom skielik uit die skaduwees, 'n sagte, mistige soort stem.

"Welkom," sê dit. "Dis gaaf om julle uiteindelik in die fisiese wêreld te sien."

Harry se eerste indruk is van 'n groot, glinsterende insek. Professor Trelawney beweeg tot in die lig van die vuur en hulle sien dat sy baie maer is; haar dik brilglase vergroot haar oë tot etlike kere hul natuurlike

grootte, en sy is gedrapeer in 'n gaserige sjaal vol blinkertjies. Ontelbare stringe kettings en krale hang om haar dun nek, en haar arms en hande is oortrek met ringe en armbande.

"Sit, my kinders, sit," sê sy, en hulle gaan sit lomp op die leunstoel, of sak neer op die poefs. Harry, Ron en Hermien gaan sit by 'n ronde tafel.

"Welkom by Waarsêery," sê professor Trelawney en gaan sit in 'n leunstoel voor die vuur. "My naam is professor Trelawney. Julle het my dalk nog nie tevore gesien nie. Ek vind dat my Innerlike Oog benewel word as ek te dikwels afdaal na die roesemoes van die gewone skool."

Niemand lewer kommentaar op hierdie buitengewone stelling nie. Professor Trelawney trek haar sjaal versigtig reg en gaan voort, "Julle het dus gekies om Waarsêery te bestudeer, die moeilikste van al die magiese kunste. Ek moet julle van meet af waarsku dat indien julle nie die Visie het nie, daar baie min is wat ek julle kan leer. In hierdie veld bring boeke 'n mens nie ver nie . . ."

Toe hulle hierdie woorde hoor, kyk sowel Harry as Ron grinnikend na Hermien, wat geskok lyk by die idee dat boeke nie van veel hulp in hierdie vak gaan wees nie.

"Baie hekse en towenaars, hoe talentvol hulle ook al mag wees wat betref harde knalgeluide en reuke en skielike verdwynings, is nog nie daartoe in staat om die versluerde geheime van die toekoms te ontfatel nie," gaan professor Trelawney voort en haar enorme, glinsterende oë beweeg van gesig na senuagtige gesig. "Dit is 'n Gawe wat net aan enkeles gegee word. Jy daar, seun," sê sy skielik vir Neville, wat amper bo van sy poef afval, "hoe gaan dit met jou ouma, is sy gesond?"

"Ek dink so," sê Neville bewurig.

"Ek sal nie so seker wees as ek jy is nie, skat," sê professor Trelawney en die lig van die vuur glinster op haar lang smaragoorbelle. Neville snak na asem. Professor Trelawney gaan bedaar voort, "Vanjaar sal ons die basiese metodes van Waarsêery dek. Die eerste kwartaal word gewy aan die lees van teeblare. Volgende kwartaal sal ons met handlesery begin. Terloops, my skat," sê sy skielik aan Parvati Patel, "pasop vir 'n rooikopman."

Parvati kyk verskrik na Ron wat reg agter haar sit en skuif haar stoel van hom af weg.

"In die somerkwartaal," gaan professor Trelawney voort, "sal ons verder na die kristalbal – mits ons klaar is met vuurvoorbodes, bygesê. Ongelukkig sal my klasse in Februarie ontwrig word deur 'n nare griepaanval. Ek sal my stem verloor. En rondom Pase sal een van ons groep ons vir goed verlaat."

'n Baie gespanne stilte volg op hierdie stelling, maar dit lyk of professor Trelawney heeltemal onbewus daarvan is.

"Ek wonder, skat," sê sy vir Hildegard Braun wat die naaste aan haar

is en terugkrimp in haar stoel, "of jy die grootste silwer teepot vir my kan aangee?"

Hildegard, wat baie verlig lyk, staan op, haal 'n enorme teepot van die rak af en sit dit op die tafel voor professor Trelawney neer.

"Dankie, my skat. Terloops, daardie ding waarvoor jy bang is – dit sal op Vrydag die sestiende Oktober gebeur."

Hildegard bewe.

"Nou wil ek julle in pare verdeel. Haal 'n teekoppie van die rak af en kom hierheen sodat ek dit kan vol maak. Gaan sit dan en drink dit; drink tot net die blare oor is. Swaai dit drie keer in die koppie rond met die linkerhand en keer die koppie dan om op die piering; wag tot die laaste bietjie tee weggedreineer het, en gee dan jou koppie aan jou maat om te lees. Julle moet bladsy vyf en ses van *Ontnewel die Toekoms* gebruik om die patrone te interpreteer. Ek sal tussen julle beweeg en julle help en leer. O, en skat –" sy vat Neville aan die arm toe hy wil opstaan, "nadat jy jou eerste koppie gebreek het, sal jy so gaaf wees om een van dié met blou patrone op te neem? Ek hou nogal baie van die pienkes."

En sowaar, Neville het skaars die rak met koppies bereik of daar is 'n getinkel van brekende porselein. Professor Trelawney kom nader geswiep met 'n skoppie en 'n handbesem en sê, "Een van die bloues, skat, as jy nie omgee nie . . . dankie . . ."

Toe Harry en Ron se teekoppies vol is, gaan hulle terug na hul tafel en probeer om die kokende vloeistof vinnig te drink. Hulle swaai die blare in die rondte soos professor Trelawney gesê het, dreineer die koppies en ruil hulle.

"Reg," sê Ron, toe hulle albei hul boeke op bladsy vyf en ses oophet. "Wat sien jy in myne?"

"'n Spul nat bruin gemors," sê Harry. Die swaar gegeurde rook in die vertrek laat hom loom en dom voel.

"Verwyd jul denke, my kinders, en laat jul oë verby die ordinêre dinge kyk!" roep professor Trelawney deur die skemerte.

Harry probeer homself regruk.

"Goed, jy het 'n soort skewe kruis . . ." sê hy terwyl hy in *Ontnewel die Toekoms* kyk. "Dit beteken jy gaan 'beproeulings en lyding' hê – jammer daaroor – maar daar's ook 'n ding wat dalk die son kan wees. Wag 'n bietjie . . . dit beteken 'groot geluk' . . . dus gaan jy ly, maar ook baie gelukkig wees . . ."

"Jy moet jou Innerlike Oog laat toets, as jy my vra," sê Ron, en albei van hulle moet hul lag sluk toe professor Trelawney na hulle kyk.

"My beurt . . ." Ron tuur in Harry se teekoppie, sy voorkop vol plooië van inspanning. "Daar's 'n kol wat 'n bietjie soos 'n hardebolkeil lyk," sê hy. "Miskien gaan jy eendag vir die Ministerie vir Towerkuns werk . . ."

Hy draai die teekoppie andersom.

“So om lyk dit meer soos ’n akker . . . wat’s dit?” Hy bestudeer sy eksemplaar van *Ontnewel die Toekoms*. “Meevaller, onverwagte goud.’ Uitstekend, jy kan vir my daarvan leen. En hier’s ’n ding,” hy draai die kopie nog ’n keer, “wat soos ’n dier lyk. Ja, as dit sy kop is . . . dit lyk soos ’n seekoei . . . nee, soos ’n skaap . . .”

Professor Trelawney draai om toe Harry proes van die lag.

“Laat ek sien, skat,” sê sy berispelend aan Ron, terwyl sy nader sweef en Harry se koppie van hom af wegraap. Almal word stil en kyk.

Professor Trelawney kyk in dié teekoppie terwyl sy dit links om swaai.

“Die valk . . . my skat, jy het ’n dodelike vyand.”

“Almal weet dit,” sê Hermien in ’n harde fluisterstem. Professor Trelawney staar na haar.

“Wel, dit is so,” sê Hermien. “Almal weet van Harry en Jy-Weet-Wie.”

Harry en Ron gaap haar aan met ’n mengsel van verbasing en bewondering. Hulle het nog nooit tevore vir Hermien so met ’n onderwyser hoor praat nie. Professor Trelawney verkies om haar nie te antwoord nie. Sy laat sak haar enorme oë weer eens na Harry se teekoppie en gaan voort om dit te swaai.

“Die knuppel . . . ’n aanval, O, liewe, dis beslis nie ’n goeie koppie nie . . .”

“Ek dag dis ’n hardebolkeil,” sê Ron skaapagtig.

“Die kopbeen . . . gevaar in jou pad, my skat . . .”

Almal staar asof vasgenael na professor Trelawney wat die koppie vir ouslaas swaai, na asem snak en dan skree.

Daar is nog ’n gerinkel van brekende porselein; Neville het sy tweede koppie gebreek. Professor Trelawney sak neer in ’n lee leunstoel, haar glinsterende hand op haar hart en haar oë toe.

“My liewe seun – my arme, dierbare seun – nee – dit is beter om dit nie te sê nie – nee – moet my nie vra nie . . .”

“Wat is dit, professor?” sê Dean Thomas dadelik. Almal het orent gekom en drom nou om Harry en Ron se tafel saam, styf teen professor Trelawney se stoel, terwyl hulle probeer om in Harry se koppie te kyk.

“My skat,” professor Trelawney se groot oë gaan dramaties oop, “jy het die Grim.”

“Die wat?” sê Harry.

Hy kan sien dat hy nie die enigste een is wat nie weet wat aangaan nie; Dean Thomas lig sy skouer en Hildegard Braun lyk verward, maar feitlik al die ander klap hul hande in afgryse oor hul monde.

“Die Grim, my skat, die Grim!” skree professor Trelawney wat geskok lyk omdat Harry nie verstaan nie. “Die reusagtige spookhond wat in begraafplase dwaal! My liewe seun, dit is ’n voorbode – die ergste voorbode – van die dood!”

Harry se maag trek saam. Daardie hond op die voorblad van *Doodsho-*

les in Sierskrif en Klatt – die hond in die skaduwees van Magnoliasingel. . . nou klap ook Hildegard Braun haar hand oor haar mond. Almal kyk na Harry; almal behalwe Hermien wat opgestaan het en agterom professor Trelawney se stoel stap.

“Ek dink nie dit lyk soos ’n Grim nie,” sê sy pront.

Professor Trelawney betrag Hermien met groeiende afkeer.

“Jy sal my verskoon as ek dit sê, skat, maar ek sien baie min aura om jou. Baie min gevoeligheid vir die vibrasies van die toekoms.”

Septimus Floris draai sy kop van kant tot kant.

“Dit lyk na ’n Grim as jy dit doen,” sê hy en trek sy oë op skrefies, “maar dit lyk meer na ’n donkie van hier af,” sê hy terwyl hy na links loon.

“Laat weet my wanneer julle klaar besluit het of ek doodgaan of nie!” roep Harry tot sy eie groot verbasing. Skielik wil niemand meer na hom kyk nie.

“Ek dink ons laat die les hier vir vandag,” sê professor Trelawney in haar mistigste stem. “Ja . . . pak asseblief julle goed weg . . .”

Die klas neem hul teekoppies stil-stil terug na professor Trelawney toe, pak hul boeke weg en maak hul tasse toe. Selfs Ron vermy Harry se oë.

“Tot weersiens,” sê professor Trelawney floutjies, “mag die geluk aan hul kant wees. O, en skat –” sy wys na Neville, “jy gaan volgende keer laat wees; maak dus seker dat jy ekstra hard werk om in te haal.”

Harry, Ron en Hermien klim in stilte met professor Trelawney se leer en die wenteltrap af, en laat vat na professor McGonagall se Transfigurasie-klas. Dit neem hulle so lank om haar klaskamer te kry dat, alhoewel hulle vroeg by Waarsêery weg is, hulle net-net betyds is.

Harry kies ’n sitplek reg agter in die klas en dit voel vir hom asof hy in ’n baie helder kollig sit; die res van die klas kyk gedurig steelsgewys na hom, nes of hy enige oomblik dood gaan neerslaan. Hy hoor skaars wat professor McGonagall vir hulle oor Animagi vertel (towenaars wat vryelik in diere kan verander) en let nie eens op toe sy haarself net daar in ’n gemmerkat met brilmerke om die oë transformeer nie.

“Regtig, wat het vandag in julle gevaar?” sê professor McGonagall toe sy met ’n ligte knal terug in haarself verander, en na hulle staar. “Nie dat dit saak maak nie, maar dis die eerste keer dat my transformasies nie ’n applous van ’n klas kry nie.”

Almal se koppe draai nogeens na Harry, maar niemand sê ’n woord nie. Dan steek Hermien haar hand op.

“Verskoon my, professor, maar ons het so pas ons eerste Waarsê-klas gehad en ons het teeblore geles en –”

“A, natuurlik,” sê professor McGonagall en frons skielik. “Dis nie nodig om meer te sê nie, juffrou La Grange. Sê my, wie van julle moet vanjaar doodgaan?”

Almal gaap haar aan.

“Ek,” sê Harry uiteindelik.

“Ek sien,” sê professor McGonagall en tuur met haar kraalogies na Harry. “Dan moet ek jou inlig, Potter, dat Sybill Trelawney nog elke jaar vandat sy hier aangekom het, ’n student se dood voorspel het. Nog nie een van hulle is dood nie. Doodsbodes is haar gunstelingmanier om ’n nuwe klas mee te groet. As dit nie was dat ek nooit van my kollegas kwaadpraat nie –” Professor McGonagall bly stil, en hulle sien dat haar neusvleuels wit geword het. Dan gaan sy voort, meer bedaad, “Waar-sêery is een van die mees onpresiese vertakkings van die towerkuns. Ek gaan dit nie wegsteek dat ek baie min geduld daarmee het nie. Ware Sieners is baie skaars, en professor Trelawney...”

Sy bly weer stil, en sê dan saaklik, “Jy lyk besonder gesond, Potter, dus sal jy my verskoon as ek daarop aandrung dat jy vandag se huiswerk doen. Ek verseker jou dat indien jy sou sterf, jy dit nie hoef in te handig nie.”

Hermien lag. Harry voel ’n bietjie beter. Dit is moeiliker om bang te wees vir ’n hopie teclare wanneer jy weg is van die dowwe rooi lig en die benewelende reuk in professor Trelawney se klaskamer. Almal is egter nie oortuig nie. Ron lyk nog steeds bekommerd en Hildegard fluister, “Maar wat van Neville se koppie?”

Toe die Transfigurasie-klas verby is, sluit hulle aan by die skare wat vir middagete na die Groot Saal toe storm.

“Ron, ontspan,” sê Hermien en stoot ’n skottel vol bredie na hom toe. “Jy het gehoor wat professor McGonagall gesê het.”

Ron skep ’n paar lepels vol bredie op sy bord en tel sy vurk op, maar hy begin nie eet nie.

“Harry,” sê hy in ’n lae, ernstige stem, “jy het nie dalk regtig ’n groot swart hond iewers gesien nie, het jy?”

“Ja, ek het,” sê Harry. “Ek het een gesien die nag toe ek weg is by die Dursleys.”

Ron se vurk val met ’n gekletter.

“Waarskynlik net ’n rondloperhond,” sê Hermien kalm.

Ron kyk na Hermien asof sy van haar kop af is.

“Hermien, as Harry ’n Grim gesien het, dan’s dit – dan’s dit erg,” sê hy. “My – my oom Bilius het een gesien – en vier-en-twintig uur later was hy dood!”

“Toeval,” sê Hermien ligweg en skink vir haarself ’n bietjie pampoen-sap.

“Jy weet nie waarvan jy praat nie!” sê Ron, wat hom begin vererg. “Die meeste towenaars is tot die dood toe bang vir ’n Grim!”

“Daar het jy dit,” sê Hermien in ’n meerderwaardige stemtoon. “Hulle sien die Grim en gaan dood van vrees. Die Grim is nie ’n doodsbode nie,

die die oorsaak van die dood! Harry is nog met ons omdat hy nie dom genoeg is om een te sien en te dink, o wel, nou moet ek seker maar lepel in die dak steek nie!”

Ron maak woordelose geluide met sy mond vir Hermien, wat haar tas oopmaak, haar nuwe Rekenmatiekboek uithaal en oop teen die beker sap still.

“Ek dink Waarsêery is uiters wollerig,” sê sy terwyl sy haar plek soek. “’n Klomp raaiwerk, as jy my vra.”

“Daar was niks wollerigs aan daardie Grim in die teekoppie nie!” sê Ron ergerlik.

“Jy’t glad nie so seker van jou saak geklink toe jy vir Harry gesê het dat dit ’n skaap is nie,” sê Hermien koeltjies.

Professor Trelawney het gesê jy’t nie die regte aura nie! Jy kan dit net nie vat om vir ’n verandering vrot in iets te wees nie!”

Hy het ’n teer snaar aangeroeer. Hermien klap haar Rekenmatiekboek so hard op die tafel dat stukkies vleis en wortel die wêreld vol spat.

“As ek moet maak of ek doodsbodes in ’n spul teeblare sien om goed te wees met Waarsêery, dan is ek nie seker dat ek dit veel langer wil neem nie! Daardie les was absolute bog in vergelyking met my Rekenmatiek-klas!”

Sy gryp haar tas en storm uit.

Ron kyk haar fronsend agterna.

“Waarvan praat sy?” sê hy vir Harry. “Sy was nog nie eens by ’n Rekenmatiek-klas nie.”

Harry is verlig toe hulle na ete uit die kasteel kan gaan. Die vorige dag se teen is verby; die lug is ’n helder, bleekgrys kleur en die gras is veerkragtig en klam onder sy voete toe hulle afsit na hul heel eerste Versorging van Magiese Kreature-klas.

Ron en Hermien praat nie met mekaar nie. Harry loop in stilte langs hulle terwyl hulle teen die skuins grasperke na Hagrid se hut aan die kant van die Verbode Woud stap. Dis eers toe hy drie alte bekende rûe voor hulle sien, dat hy besef dat hulle hierdie klasse saam met die Slibberins het. Malfoy gesels lewendig met Krabbe en Goliat wat proes van die lag. Harry is seker hy weet waarom hulle praat.

Hagrid staan vir sy klas in die deur van sy hut en wag. Hy dra sy molveloorjas, Tande die beerhond staan langs hom, en Hagrid lyk gretig om te begin.

“Komaan, maak gou!” roep hy uit toe die klas nader kom. “Het vandag ’n groot verrassing vir julle! Lekker les wat op julle wag! Almal hier? Goed, volg my!”

Vir een aaklige oomblik dink Harry dat Hagrid hulle na die Woud gaan neem; Harry het al genoeg nare ervarings vir ’n leeftyd daar gehad. Hagrid

stap egter om die kant van die bome verby, en vyf minute later bevind hulle hulself buite 'n soort kampie. Daar is niks daarbinne nie.

"Almal kom nader aan die omheining hier langs my!" roep hy uit. "So ja – maak seker dat julle kan sien. Nou, die eerste ding wat julle moet doen, is om jul boeke oop te maak –"

"Hoe?" sê die koue, dralende stem van Draco Malfoy.

"H'm?" sê Hagrid.

"Hoe maak 'n mens hierdie boek oop?" herhaal Malfoy. Hy haal sy eksemplaar van *Die Monsterboek van Monsters* uit, wat hy met 'n stuk tou toegebind het. Ander mense haal hulle s'n ook uit; party het, soos Harry, hul boeke met hul gordels vasgebind; ander het hulle in stywe sakke gedruk of met yslike papierklemme vasgeklamp.

"Het – kon nie een van julle jul boeke oopkry nie?" vra Hagrid afgehaal.

Die hele klas skud hul koppe.

"Julle moet hulle *streef*," sê Hagrid asof dit die mees logiese ding op aarde is. "Kyk . . ."

Hy neem Hermien se eksemplaar en skeur die Spreuklint waarmee dit toegeplak is, af. Die boek probeer byt, maar Hagrid trek 'n reusevooring teen sy rug af sodat die boek bewe, toe oopval en roerloos in sy hand bly lê.

"O, hoe dom was ons nie!" sê Malfoy smalend. "Ons moes hulle *ge-streef* het! Ons moes dit sommer geraai het!"

"Ek . . . ek het gedink dis pret," sê Hagrid onseker vir Hermien.

"O, verskriklike groot pret!" sê Malfoy. "Baie snaaks om vir ons boeke te gee wat ons hande probeer afbyt!"

"Hou jou mond, Malfoy," sê Harry onderlangs. Hagrid lyk bekaf en Harry wil hê dat Hagrid se eerste les 'n sukses moet wees.

"Goed dan," sê Hagrid wat lyk asof hy sy draad verloor het, "so . . . so julle het julle boeke en . . . en . . . nou moet julle net die magiese kreature kry. Ja. Ek gaan hulle gou haal. Wag net . . ."

Hy loop na die Woud en verdwyn uit sig.

"Vader, maar hierdie plek is besig om agteruit te gaan," sê Malfoy hard. "Dat daardie sot klas gee! My pa sal 'n toeval kry as ek hom moet vertel –"

"Hou jou mond, Malfoy," herhaal Harry.

"Oppas, Potter, daar's 'n Dementor agter jou –"

"Oeeeeee!" gil Hildegard Braun en wys na die oorkant van die kampie.

'n Dosyn van die mees bisarre kreature wat Harry nog ooit gesien het, kom na hulle toe aangedraf. Hulle het die lywe, agterpote en sterte van perde, maar die voorbene, vlerke en koppe van wat na reusearende lyk, met wrede, staalkleurige snawels en groot blinkoranje oë. Die kloue aan hul voorbene is omtrent dertig sentimeter lank en lyk dodelik. Elkeen van die gediertes het 'n dik leerhalsband om die nek, met 'n lang ketting

daaraan; Hagrid, wat agter die kreature in die kampie inhardloop, hou die punte van al die kettings in sy yslike hande vas.

“Kom, hiernatoe!” brul hy terwyl hy die kettings ruk en die kreature na die omheining stuur waar die klas wag. Almal tree effens terug toe Hagrid nader kom en die kreature na die omheining lei.

“Hippogriewe!” brul Hagrid in sy skik en wuif na hulle. “Pragtig, nê?” Harry kan op ’n manier sien wat Hagrid bedoel.

As jy oor die ergste skok is van iets sien wat half perd en half voël is, dan merk jy hoe die Hippogriewe se glimmende velle geleidelik van vere na hare verander. Elkeen is ’n ander kleur: somber grys, brons, ’n rooierige skimmel, glansende kastaiingsbruin en inkswart.

“So,” sê Hagrid terwyl hy sy hande vryf en in die rondte glimlag, “as julle ’n bietjie nader wil kom . . .”

Niemand lyk lus nie. Harry, Ron en Hermien beweeg egter versigtig nader aan die omheining.

“Nou die eerste ding wat julle oor Hippogriewe moet weet, is dat hulle trots is,” sê Hagrid. “Hulle neem maklik aanstoot. Moet nooit een beledig nie; dit kan dalk die laaste ding wees wat jy ooit doen.”

Malfoy, Krabbe en Goliat luister nie; hulle praat onderlangs en Harry het ’n nare gevoel dat hulle planne maak om die les te ontwig.

“’n Mens wag altyd dat die Hippogrief eerste reageer,” gaan Hagrid voort. “Dis goeie maniere, sien? Jy stap na hom toe en jy buig en jy wag. As hy terugbuig, dan kan jy aan hom raak. As hy nie buig nie, moet jy vinnig spore maak, want daardie kloue maak seer.

“Reg – wie wil eerste probeer?”

Die meeste van die klas val verder terug. Selfs Harry, Ron en Hermien het hul bedenkinge. Die Hippogriewe gooi hul wrede koppe agteroor en strek hul kragtige vlerke; dit lyk nie of hulle daarvan hou om so geketting te staan nie.

“Niemand nie?” sê Hagrid pleitend.

“Ek sal,” sê Harry.

Daar is ’n skerp ruising soos asems agter hom ingetrek word, en sowel Hildegard as Parvati fluister, “Oeee, nee, Harry, onthou jou teeblare!”

Harry ignoreer hulle. Hy klim oor die kampie se omheining.

“Ditsem, Harry!” brul Hagrid. “Nou toe – laat ons sien hoe jy met Bokbok vaar.”

Hy maak een van die kettings los, trek die grys Hippogrief weg van sy maters en haal die leernekband af. Dis of die hele klas aan die ander kant van die kamp hul asem ophou. Malfoy se oë is op gemene skrefies getrek.

“Hanou, Harry,” sê Hagrid sag. “Jy moet oogkontak maak, maar probeer om nie jou oë te knip nie – Hippogriewe vertrou nie mense wat hul oë te veel knip nie . . .”

Harry se oë begin onmiddellik traan, maar hy maak hulle nie toe nie. Bokbok het sy groot, skerp kop gedraai en gluur na Harry met een kwaai, oranje oog.

"Mooi so," sê Hagrid. "Dis reg, Harry . . . buig nou . . ."

Harry is nie eintlik lus om die agterkant van sy nek vir Bokbok te wys nie, maar hy maak soos vir hom gesê is. Hy buig vinnig en kyk dan op.

Die Hippogrief gluur nog steeds hoogmoedig na hom. Dit roer nie.

"H'm," sê Hagrid en hy klink bekommerd. "Reg – agtertoe, Harry, stadig – stadig –"

Toe, tot Harry se grootste verbasing, knak die Hippogrief skielik sy skubberige knieë en maak 'n duidelike buiging.

"Mooi so, Harry!" sê Hagrid ekstaties. "Reg – jy mag aan hom raak! Vat aan sy bek, toe!"

Harry voel dat om te mag padgee 'n baie beter beloning sal wees, maar hy beweeg tog stadig tot by die Hippogrief en steek sy hand na hom uit. Hy streek die bek etlike kere en die Hippogrief maak sy oë luiweg toe, nes of dit vir hom lekker is.

Die hele klas juig hom toe, behalwe Malfoy, Krabbe en Goliath wat diep teleurgesteld lyk.

"Dis reg, Harry," sê Hagrid, "ek reken hy sal toelaat dat jy op hom ry!"

Dit is baie meer as waarop Harry voorbereid was. Hy is gewoon aan 'n besemstok, maar hy is glad nie seker dat hy 'n Hippogrief sal kan hanteer nie.

"Jy klim net daar op, agter die vlerk se gewrig," sê Hagrid, "en pasop dat jy nie van sy vere uittrek nie, hy sal nie daarvan hou nie . . ."

Harry sit sy voet op Bokbok se vlerk en hys homself tot op sy rug. Bokbok staan op. Harry weet nie waar om vas te hou nie; alles voor hom is bedek met vere.

"Weg is jy!" brul Hagrid, en hy raps die Hippogrief oor sy boude.

Die vier meter lange vlerke aan weerskante van Harry gaan sonder waarskuwing oop; hy het skaars tyd om die Hippogrief om die nek te gryp voor hulle die lug klief. Dit is heeltemal anders as op 'n besemstok, en Harry weet watter een hy verkies; die Hippogrief se vlerke klap ongemaklik weerskante van hom en vang hom onder teen die bene sodat dit voel of hy afgegooi gaan word; die glansende vere glip deur sy vingers en hy kan dit nie waag om 'n beter greep te probeer kry nie; pleks van die gladde aksie van die Nimbus Tweeduisend beweeg hy vorentoe en agtertoe soos die Hippogrief se agterstewe saam met sy vlerke styg en sak.

Bokbok vlieg een keer om die kampie en daal dan grond toe; dit is die stukkie waarvoor Harry die bangste is; hy leun ver terug toe die gladde nek begin sak; dit voel asof hy oor die kop gaan gly; dan voel hy 'n swaar slag toe die vier verskillende pote die grond tref, en hy slaag net-net daarin om bo te bly en homself weer regop te stoot.

“Uitstekend, Harry!” brul Hagrid toe almal behalwe Malfoy, Krabbe en Goliat hom toejuig. “Goed, wie wil nog probeer?”

Aangemoedig deur Harry se sukses, klim die res van die klas versigtig deur die omheining tot in die kampie. Hagrid maak die Hippogriewe een na die ander los, en net gou is mense oor die hele kamp besig om senuagtig te buig. Neville hou aan weghardloop vir syne wat nie lyk of hy sy knieë wil buig nie. Ron en Hermien oefen op die kastaingbruine, terwyl Harry toekyk.

Malfoy, Krabbe en Goliat het vir Bokbok oorgeneem. Hy het vir Malfoy gebuig, wat nou sy bek streel en minagtend lyk.

“Dis baie maklik,” sê Malfoy dralend, hard genoeg sodat Harry kan hoor. “Ek het geweet dit moet wees as Potter dit kan doen . . . ek wed jy is glad nie gevaarlik nie, of hoe?” sê hy vir die Hippogrief. “Is jy, jou aaklige, lelike gedierte?”

Dit gebeur in ’n blits van staalkloue; Malfoy skree hoog, en die volgende oomblik is Hagrid met Bokbok aan die stoei om sy nekband terug te sit, terwyl Bokbok strek om vir Malfoy by te kom waar hy opgekrul op die gras lê met sy kleed vol bloed.

“Ek gaan dood!” gil Malfoy, terwyl die klas paniekbevange raak. “Ek gaan dood, kyk na my! Hy’t my doodgemaak!”

“Jy gaan g’n stuk dood nie!” sê Hagrid wat baie bleek geword het. “Iemand help my – kry hom hier uit – moet hom hier uitkry –”

Hermien hardloop na die hek om dit oop te maak, terwyl Hagrid maklik vir Malfoy optel. In die verbystap sien Harry dat daar ’n lang, diep sny aan Malfoy se arm is; bloed drup op die gras en Hagrid hardloop met hom teen die helling op na die kasteel.

Die res van die Versorging van Magiese Kreature-klas loop geskok agterna. Die Slibberins skree almal oor Hagrid.

“Hulle moet hom die trekpas gee!” sê Pansy Parkinson wat in trane is.

“Dit was Malfoy se skuld!” snou Dean Thomas. Krabbe en Goliat maak dreigend vuis.

Hulle klim op met die kliptrappe na die verlate ingangsportaal.

“Ek gaan gou kyk of hy oukei is!” sê Pansy en hulle kyk hoe sy met die marmertrappe ophardloop. Die Slibberins, wat nog oor Hagrid brom, beweeg in die rigting van hul kerkergeselskamer, en Harry, Ron en Hermien gaan boontoe na die Griffindortoring.

“Dink julle hy sal oukei wees?” sê Hermien senuagtig.

“Natuurlik sal hy, Madame Pomfrey maak so ’n sny in ’n japtrap reg,” sê Harry, wat al erger beserings deur die matrone laat regtoor het.

“Dit was regtig ’n nare ding om in Hagrid se eerste klas te gebeur, nè?” sê Ron en hy lyk bekommerd. “Dis net Malfoy wat alles so vir hom sal opfoeter . . .”

Hulle is onder die eerstes wat die Groot Saal vir aandete bereik in die

hoop dat hulle vir Hagrid sal sien, maar hy is nie daar nie.

"Hulle sal hom darem seker nie in die pad steek nie, sal hulle?" sê Hermien benoud. Sy het nog nie aan haar bief-en-niertjie-pastei geraak nie.

"Hulle beter nie," sê Ron wat ook nie kan eet nie.

Harry hou die Slibberintafel dop. 'n Groot groep wat Krabbe en Goliath insluit, sit diep in gesprek saamgedrom. Harry is seker hulle is besig om hul eie weergawe van hoe Malfoy seergekry het, te versin.

"Wel, niemand kan sê dat dit nie 'n interessante eerste dag was nie," sê Ron grimmig.

Na ete gaan hulle na die gepakte Griffindor-geselskamer en probeer om die huiswerk wat professor McGonagall vir hulle gegee het, te doen, maar al drie van hulle laat sak elke nou en dan hul penne om deur die toring se venster te tuur.

"Daar is 'n lig in Hagrid se venster," sê Harry skielik.

Ron loer na sy horlosie.

"As ons gou maak, kan ons hom gaan sien, dis nog taamlik vroeg . . ."

"Ek weet darem nie," sê Hermien stadig, en Harry sien hoe sy na hom kyk.

"Ek mag oor die *terrein* loop," sê hy afgemete. "Sirius Swardt het nog nie *hier* verby die Dementors gekom nie, het hy?"

Hulle pak dus hul goed weg en kies koers deur die portretopening, verlig dat hulle niemand op pad na die voordeur teëgekom het nie, want hulle is glad nie seker of hulle wel mag uitgaan nie.

Die gras is nog steeds nat en lyk amper swart in die skemerdonker. Toe hulle by Hagrid se hut kom, klop hulle, en 'n stem grom, "Kom in."

Hagrid sit by sy geskropte houttafel, sonder baadjie, sy beerhond, Tande, se kop rus op sy skoot. Een kyk is genoeg vir hulle om te sien dat Hagrid kwaai gedrink het; 'n piouter-drinkkan wat amper so groot soos 'n emmer is, staan voor hom, en dit lyk of hy met moeite op hulle fokus.

"Is seker 'n rekord," sê hy swaarmoedig toe hy hulle herken. "Dink nie hulle het al ooit 'n onderwyser gehad wat net een dag gehou het nie."

"Is jy afgedank, Hagrid!" sê Hermien en snak na asem.

"Nog nie," sê Hagrid mistroostig, en neem 'n groot sluk van wat ook al in die drinkkan is. "Maar's seker net 'n kwessie van tyd, nè, na Malfoy . . ."

"Hoe gaan dit met hom?" vra Ron toe hulle almal sit. "Dis darem seker nie ernstig nie, nè?"

"Madame Pomfrey het hom so goed moontlik opgefiels," sê Hagrid lusteloos, "maar hy sê hy't vreeslik pyn . . . toegedraai in verbande kerm . . ."

"Hy sit aan," sê Harry dadelik. "Madame Pomfrey kan enigiets regmaak. Verlede jaar het sy die helfte van my skelet weer laat toegroei. Dis net Malfoy wat iets so kan uitbuit."

“Skoolbestuurslede is natuurlik laat weet,” sê Hagrid mistroostig. “Hulle reken ek het te groot begin. Moes die Hippogriewe vir later gelos het . . . moes Flobberwurms of so iets gebruik het . . . is net dat ek gedink het dit sal 'n lekker eerste les wees . . . is alles my skuld . . .”

“Dis Malfoy se skuld, Hagrid,” sê Hermien beslis.

“Ons is getuies,” sê Harry. “Jy het gesê die Hippogriewe sal 'n mens aanval as jy hulle beledig. Dis Malfoy se skuld dat hy nie geluister het nie. Ons sal vir Dompeldorius sê wat regtig gebeur het.”

“Ja, moenie bekommerd wees nie, Hagrid, ons sal jou ondersteun,” sê Ron.

Trane drup uit die verrimpelde hoeke van Hagrid se kewerswart oë. Hy gryp vir sowel Harry as Ron en trek hulle nader in 'n versmorende omhelsing.

“Ek dink jy het genoeg gehad om te drink, Hagrid,” sê Hermien ferm. Hy tel die drinkkan van die tafel af op en gaan uit om dit leeg te maak.

“H'm, sy's dalk reg,” sê Hagrid terwyl hy vir Harry en Ron laat los, wat albei eenkant toe strompel en hul ribbes vryf. Hagrid hys homself op uit sy stoel en volg Hermien op onvaste bene buitentoe. Hulle hoor 'n harde geplasp.

“Wat het hy gedoen?” vra Harry senuagtig toe Hermien met die leë drinkkan terugkom.

“Sy kop in die watervaatjie gedruk,” sê Hermien terwyl sy die drinkkan wegpak.

Toe Hagrid terugkom, is sy lang hare en baard druipnat, en hy vee die water uit sy oë.

“Dis beter,” sê hy, skud sy kop soos 'n hond en spat almal nat. “Luister, dit was gaaf van julle om hierheen te kom om my te kom sien, ek het regtig —”

Hagrid word skielik stil en staar na Harry asof hy nou eers besef dat hy daar is.

“WAT DINK JY DOEN JY, HÊ?” brul hy, so onverwags dat hulle 'n halwe meter die lug in spring. “JY MAG NIE NA DONKER BUIE ROND-
DWAAL NIE, HARRY! EN JULLE TWEE LAAT HOM TOE!”

Met een tree is Hagrid by Harry. Hy gryp sy arm en trek hom na die deur toe.

“Komaan!” sê Hagrid ergerlik. “Ek neem julle terug skool toe, en julle stap nie weer na donker af na my toe nie. Ek's dit nie werd nie!”

CHAPTER SEVEN



THE BOGGART IN THE WARDROBE

Malfoy didn't reappear in classes until late on Thursday morning, when the Slytherins and Gryffindors were halfway through double Potions. He swaggered into the dungeon, his right arm covered in bandages and bound up in a sling, acting, in Harry's opinion, as though he were the heroic survivor of some dreadful battle.

"How is it, Draco?" simpered Pansy Parkinson. "Does it hurt much?"

"Yeah," said Malfoy, putting on a brave sort of grimace. But Harry saw him wink at Crabbe and Goyle when Pansy had looked away.

"Settle down, settle down," said Professor Snape idly.

Harry and Ron scowled at each other; Snape wouldn't have said "settle down" if *they'd* walked in late, he'd have given them detention. But Malfoy had always been able to get away with anything in Snape's classes; Snape was head of Slytherin House, and generally favored his own students above all others.

They were making a new potion today, a Shrinking Solution. Malfoy set up his cauldron right next to Harry and Ron, so that they were preparing their ingredients on the same table.

"Sir," Malfoy called, "sir, I'll need help cutting up these daisy roots, because of my arm —"

"Weasley, cut up Malfoy's roots for him," said Snape without looking up.

Ron went brick red.

"There's nothing wrong with your arm," he hissed at Malfoy.

Malfoy smirked across the table.

"Weasley, you heard Professor Snape; cut up these roots."

Ron seized his knife, pulled Malfoy's roots toward him, and began to chop them roughly, so that they were all different sizes.

"Professor," drawled Malfoy, "Weasley's mutilating my roots, sir."

Snape approached their table, stared down his hooked nose at the roots, then gave Ron an unpleasant smile from beneath his long, greasy black hair.

"Change roots with Malfoy, Weasley."

"But, sir — !"

Ron had spent the last quarter of an hour carefully shredding his own roots into exactly equal pieces.

“Now,” said Snape in his most dangerous voice.

Ron shoved his own beautifully cut roots across the table at Malfoy, then took up the knife again.

“And, sir, I’ll need this shrivelfig skinned,” said Malfoy, his voice full of malicious laughter.

“Potter, you can skin Malfoy’s shrivelfig,” said Snape, giving Harry the look of loathing he always reserved just for him.

Harry took Malfoy’s shrivelfig as Ron began trying to repair the damage to the roots he now had to use. Harry skinned the shrivelfig as fast as he could and flung it back across the table at Malfoy without speaking. Malfoy was smirking more broadly than ever.

“Seen your pal Hagrid lately?” he asked them quietly.

“None of your business,” said Ron jerkily, without looking up.

“I’m afraid he won’t be a teacher much longer,” said Malfoy in a tone of mock sorrow. “Father’s not very happy about my injury —”

“Keep talking, Malfoy, and I’ll give you a real injury,” snarled Ron.

“— he’s complained to the school governors. *And* to the Ministry of Magic. Father’s got a lot of influence, you know. And a lasting injury like this” — he gave a huge, fake sigh — “who knows if my arm’ll ever be the same again?”

“So that’s why you’re putting it on,” said Harry, accidentally beheading a dead caterpillar because his hand was shaking in anger. “To try to get Hagrid fired.”

“Well,” said Malfoy, lowering his voice to a whisper, “*partly*, Potter. But there are other benefits too. Weasley, slice my caterpillars for me.”

A few cauldrons away, Neville was in trouble. Neville regularly went to pieces in Potions lessons; it was his worst subject, and his great fear of Professor Snape made things ten times worse. His potion, which was supposed to be a bright, acid green, had turned —

“Orange, Longbottom,” said Snape, ladling some up and allowing it to splash back into the cauldron, so that everyone could see. “Orange. Tell me, boy, does anything penetrate that thick skull of yours? Didn’t you hear me say, quite clearly, that only one rat spleen was needed? Didn’t I state plainly that a dash of leech juice would suffice? What do I have to do to make you understand, Longbottom?”

Neville was pink and trembling. He looked as though he was on the verge of tears.

“Please, sir,” said Hermione, “please, I could help Neville put it right —”

“I don’t remember asking you to show off, Miss Granger,” said Snape coldly, and Hermione went as pink as Neville. “Longbottom, at the end of this lesson we will feed a few drops of this potion to your toad and see what happens. Perhaps that will encourage you to do it properly.”

Snape moved away, leaving Neville breathless with fear.

“Help me!” he moaned to Hermione.

“Hey, Harry,” said Seamus Finnigan, leaning over to borrow Harry’s brass scales, “have you heard? *Daily Prophet* this morning — they reckon Sirius Black’s been sighted.”

“Where?” said Harry and Ron quickly. On the other side of the table, Malfoy looked up, listening closely.

“Not too far from here,” said Seamus, who looked excited. “It was

a Muggle who saw him. 'Course, she didn't really understand. The Muggles think he's just an ordinary criminal, don't they? So she phoned the telephone hot line. By the time the Ministry of Magic got there, he was gone."

"Not too far from here . . .," Ron repeated, looking significantly at Harry. He turned around and saw Malfoy watching closely. "What, Malfoy? Need something else skinned?"

But Malfoy's eyes were shining malevolently, and they were fixed on Harry. He leaned across the table.

"Thinking of trying to catch Black single-handed, Potter?"

"Yeah, that's right," said Harry offhandedly.

Malfoy's thin mouth was curving in a mean smile.

"Of course, if it was me," he said quietly, "I'd have done something before now. I wouldn't be staying in school like a good boy, I'd be out there looking for him."

"What are you talking about, Malfoy?" said Ron roughly.

"Don't you *know*, Potter?" breathed Malfoy, his pale eyes narrowed.

"Know what?"

Malfoy let out a low, sneering laugh.

"Maybe you'd rather not risk your neck," he said. "Want to leave it to the dementors, do you? But if it was me, I'd want revenge. I'd hunt him down myself."

"*What are you talking about?*" said Harry angrily, but at that moment Snape called, "You should have finished adding your ingredients by now; this potion needs to stew before it can be drunk, so clear away while it simmers and then we'll test

Longbottom's. . . .”

Crabbe and Goyle laughed openly, watching Neville sweat as he stirred his potion feverishly. Hermione was muttering instructions to him out of the corner of her mouth, so that Snape wouldn't see. Harry and Ron packed away their unused ingredients and went to wash their hands and ladles in the stone basin in the corner.

“What did Malfoy mean?” Harry muttered to Ron as he stuck his hands under the icy jet that poured from the gargoyle's mouth. “Why would I want revenge on Black? He hasn't done anything to me — yet.”

“He's making it up,” said Ron savagely. “He's trying to make you do something stupid. . . .”

The end of the lesson in sight, Snape strode over to Neville, who was cowering by his cauldron.

“Everyone gather 'round,” said Snape, his black eyes glittering, “and watch what happens to Longbottom's toad. If he has managed to produce a Shrinking Solution, it will shrink to a tadpole. If, as I don't doubt, he has done it wrong, his toad is likely to be poisoned.”

The Gryffindors watched fearfully. The Slytherins looked excited. Snape picked up Trevor the toad in his left hand and dipped a small spoon into Neville's potion, which was now green. He trickled a few drops down Trevor's throat.

There was a moment of hushed silence, in which Trevor gulped; then there was a small pop, and Trevor the tadpole was wriggling in Snape's palm.

The Gryffindors burst into applause. Snape, looking sour, pulled a small bottle from the pocket of his robe, poured a few drops on top

of Trevor, and he reappeared suddenly, fully grown.

“Five points from Gryffindor,” said Snape, which wiped the smiles from every face. “I told you not to help him, Miss Granger. Class dismissed.”

Harry, Ron, and Hermione climbed the steps to the entrance hall. Harry was still thinking about what Malfoy had said, while Ron was seething about Snape.

“Five points from Gryffindor because the potion was all right! Why didn’t you lie, Hermione? You should’ve said Neville did it all by himself!”

Hermione didn’t answer. Ron looked around.

“Where is she?”

Harry turned too. They were at the top of the steps now, watching the rest of the class pass them, heading for the Great Hall and lunch.

“She was right behind us,” said Ron, frowning.

Malfoy passed them, walking between Crabbe and Goyle. He smirked at Harry and disappeared.

“There she is,” said Harry.

Hermione was panting slightly, hurrying up the stairs; one hand clutched her bag, the other seemed to be tucking something down the front of her robes.

“How did you do that?” said Ron.

“What?” said Hermione, joining them.

“One minute you were right behind us, the next moment, you were back at the bottom of the stairs again.”

“What?” Hermione looked slightly confused. “Oh — I had to go

back for something. Oh no —”

A seam had split on Hermione's bag. Harry wasn't surprised; he could see that it was crammed with at least a dozen large and heavy books.

“Why are you carrying all these around with you?” Ron asked her.

“You know how many subjects I'm taking,” said Hermione breathlessly. “Couldn't hold these for me, could you?”

“But —” Ron was turning over the books she had handed him, looking at the covers. “You haven't got any of these subjects today. It's only Defense Against the Dark Arts this afternoon.”

“Oh yes,” said Hermione vaguely, but she packed all the books back into her bag just the same. “I hope there's something good for lunch, I'm starving,” she added, and she marched off toward the Great Hall.

“D'you get the feeling Hermione's not telling us something?” Ron asked Harry.

Professor Lupin wasn't there when they arrived at his first Defense Against the Dark Arts lesson. They all sat down, took out their books, quills, and parchment, and were talking when he finally entered the room. Lupin smiled vaguely and placed his tatty old briefcase on the teacher's desk. He was as shabby as ever but looked healthier than he had on the train, as though he had had a few square meals.

“Good afternoon,” he said. “Would you please put all your books back in your bags. Today's will be a practical lesson. You will need only your wands.”

A few curious looks were exchanged as the class put away their

books. They had never had a practical Defense Against the Dark Arts before, unless you counted the memorable class last year when their old teacher had brought a cageful of pixies to class and set them loose.

“Right then,” said Professor Lupin, when everyone was ready. “If you’d follow me.”

Puzzled but interested, the class got to its feet and followed Professor Lupin out of the classroom. He led them along the deserted corridor and around a corner, where the first thing they saw was Peeves the Poltergeist, who was floating upside down in midair and stuffing the nearest keyhole with chewing gum.

Peeves didn’t look up until Professor Lupin was two feet away; then he wiggled his curly-toed feet and broke into song.

“Loony, loopy Lupin,” Peeves sang. “Loony, loopy Lupin, loony, loopy Lupin —”

Rude and unmanageable as he almost always was, Peeves usually showed some respect toward the teachers. Everyone looked quickly at Professor Lupin to see how he would take this; to their surprise, he was still smiling.

“I’d take that gum out of the keyhole if I were you, Peeves,” he said pleasantly. “Mr. Filch won’t be able to get in to his brooms.”

Filch was the Hogwarts caretaker, a bad-tempered, failed wizard who waged a constant war against the students and, indeed, Peeves. However, Peeves paid no attention to Professor Lupin’s words, except to blow a loud wet raspberry.

Professor Lupin gave a small sigh and took out his wand.

“This is a useful little spell,” he told the class over his shoulder.

“Please watch closely.”

He raised the wand to shoulder height, said, “*Waddiwasi!*” and pointed it at Peeves.

With the force of a bullet, the wad of chewing gum shot out of the keyhole and straight down Peeves’s left nostril; he whirled upright and zoomed away, cursing.

“Cool, sir!” said Dean Thomas in amazement.

“Thank you, Dean,” said Professor Lupin, putting his wand away again. “Shall we proceed?”

They set off again, the class looking at shabby Professor Lupin with increased respect. He led them down a second corridor and stopped, right outside the staffroom door.

“Inside, please,” said Professor Lupin, opening it and standing back.

The staffroom, a long, paneled room full of old, mismatched chairs, was empty except for one teacher. Professor Snape was sitting in a low armchair, and he looked around as the class filed in. His eyes were glittering and there was a nasty sneer playing around his mouth. As Professor Lupin came in and made to close the door behind him, Snape said, “Leave it open, Lupin. I’d rather not witness this.”

He got to his feet and strode past the class, his black robes billowing behind him. At the doorway he turned on his heel and said, “Possibly no one’s warned you, Lupin, but this class contains Neville Longbottom. I would advise you not to entrust him with anything difficult. Not unless Miss Granger is hissing instructions in his ear.”

Neville went scarlet. Harry glared at Snape; it was bad enough

that he bullied Neville in his own classes, let alone doing it in front of other teachers.

Professor Lupin had raised his eyebrows.

“I was hoping that Neville would assist me with the first stage of the operation,” he said, “and I am sure he will perform it admirably.”

Neville’s face went, if possible, even redder. Snape’s lip curled, but he left, shutting the door with a snap.

“Now, then,” said Professor Lupin, beckoning the class toward the end of the room, where there was nothing but an old wardrobe where the teachers kept their spare robes. As Professor Lupin went to stand next to it, the wardrobe gave a sudden wobble, banging off the wall.

“Nothing to worry about,” said Professor Lupin calmly because a few people had jumped backward in alarm. “There’s a boggart in there.”

Most people seemed to feel that this *was* something to worry about. Neville gave Professor Lupin a look of pure terror, and Seamus Finnigan eyed the now rattling doorknob apprehensively.

“Boggarts like dark, enclosed spaces,” said Professor Lupin. “Wardrobes, the gap beneath beds, the cupboards under sinks — I once met one that had lodged itself in a grandfather clock. *This* one moved in yesterday afternoon, and I asked the headmaster if the staff would leave it to give my third years some practice.

“So, the first question we must ask ourselves is, *what is a boggart?*”

Hermione put up her hand.

“It’s a shape-shifter,” she said. “It can take the shape of whatever it thinks will frighten us most.”

“Couldn’t have put it better myself,” said Professor Lupin, and Hermione glowed. “So the boggart sitting in the darkness within has not yet assumed a form. He does not yet know what will frighten the person on the other side of the door. Nobody knows what a boggart looks like when he is alone, but when I let him out, he will immediately become whatever each of us most fears.

“This means,” said Professor Lupin, choosing to ignore Neville’s small sputter of terror, “that we have a huge advantage over the boggart before we begin. Have you spotted it, Harry?”

Trying to answer a question with Hermione next to him, bobbing up and down on the balls of her feet with her hand in the air, was very off-putting, but Harry had a go.

“Er — because there are so many of us, it won’t know what shape it should be?”

“Precisely,” said Professor Lupin, and Hermione put her hand down, looking a little disappointed. “It’s always best to have company when you’re dealing with a boggart. He becomes confused. Which should he become, a headless corpse or a flesh-eating slug? I once saw a boggart make that very mistake — tried to frighten two people at once and turned himself into half a slug. Not remotely frightening.

“The charm that repels a boggart is simple, yet it requires force of mind. You see, the thing that really finishes a boggart is *laughter*. What you need to do is force it to assume a shape that you find amusing.

“We will practice the charm without wands first. After me, please . . . *Riddikulus!*”

"Riddikulus!" said the class together.

"Good," said Professor Lupin. "Very good. But that was the easy part, I'm afraid. You see, the word alone is not enough. And this is where you come in, Neville."

The wardrobe shook again, though not as much as Neville, who walked forward as though he were heading for the gallows.

"Right, Neville," said Professor Lupin. "First things first: What would you say is the thing that frightens you most in the world?"

Neville's lips moved, but no noise came out.

"Didn't catch that, Neville, sorry," said Professor Lupin cheerfully.

Neville looked around rather wildly, as though begging someone to help him, then said, in barely more than a whisper, "Professor Snape."

Nearly everyone laughed. Even Neville grinned apologetically. Professor Lupin, however, looked thoughtful.

"Professor Snape . . . hmmm . . . Neville, I believe you live with your grandmother?"

"Er — yes," said Neville nervously. "But — I don't want the boggart to turn into her either."

"No, no, you misunderstand me," said Professor Lupin, now smiling. "I wonder, could you tell us what sort of clothes your grandmother usually wears?"

Neville looked startled, but said, "Well . . . always the same hat. A tall one with a stuffed vulture on top. And a long dress . . . green, normally . . . and sometimes a fox-fur scarf."

"And a handbag?" prompted Professor Lupin.

“A big red one,” said Neville.

“Right then,” said Professor Lupin. “Can you picture those clothes very clearly, Neville? Can you see them in your mind’s eye?”

“Yes,” said Neville uncertainly, plainly wondering what was coming next.

“When the boggart bursts out of this wardrobe, Neville, and sees you, it will assume the form of Professor Snape,” said Lupin. “And you will raise your wand — thus — and cry ‘*Riddikulus*’ — and concentrate hard on your grandmother’s clothes. If all goes well, Professor Boggart Snape will be forced into that vulture-topped hat, and that green dress, with that big red handbag.”

There was a great shout of laughter. The wardrobe wobbled more violently.

“If Neville is successful, the boggart is likely to shift his attention to each of us in turn,” said Professor Lupin. “I would like all of you to take a moment now to think of the thing that scares you most, and imagine how you might force it to look comical. . . .”

The room went quiet. Harry thought . . . What scared him most in the world?

His first thought was Lord Voldemort — a Voldemort returned to full strength. But before he had even started to plan a possible counterattack on a boggart-Voldemort, a horrible image came floating to the surface of his mind. . . .

A rotting, glistening hand, slithering back beneath a black cloak . . . a long, rattling breath from an unseen mouth . . . then a cold so penetrating it felt like drowning . . .

Harry shivered, then looked around, hoping no one had noticed.

Many people had their eyes shut tight. Ron was muttering to himself, "Take its legs off." Harry was sure he knew what that was about. Ron's greatest fear was spiders.

"Everyone ready?" said Professor Lupin.

Harry felt a lurch of fear. He wasn't ready. How could you make a dementor less frightening? But he didn't want to ask for more time; everyone else was nodding and rolling up their sleeves.

"Neville, we're going to back away," said Professor Lupin. "Let you have a clear field, all right? I'll call the next person forward. Everyone back, now, so Neville can get a clear shot —"

They all retreated, backed against the walls, leaving Neville alone beside the wardrobe. He looked pale and frightened, but he had pushed up the sleeves of his robes and was holding his wand ready.

"On the count of three, Neville," said Professor Lupin, who was pointing his own wand at the handle of the wardrobe. "One — two — three — *now!*"

A jet of sparks shot from the end of Professor Lupin's wand and hit the doorknob. The wardrobe burst open. Hook-nosed and menacing, Professor Snape stepped out, his eyes flashing at Neville.

Neville backed away, his wand up, mouthing wordlessly. Snape was bearing down upon him, reaching inside his robes.

"*R-R-Riddikulus!*" squeaked Neville.

There was a noise like a whip crack. Snape stumbled; he was wearing a long, lace-trimmed dress and a towering hat topped with a moth-eaten vulture, and he was swinging a huge crimson handbag.

There was a roar of laughter; the boggart paused, confused, and Professor Lupin shouted, "Parvati! Forward!"

Parvati walked forward, her face set. Snape rounded on her. There was another crack, and where he had stood was a blood-stained, bandaged mummy; its sightless face was turned to Parvati and it began to walk toward her very slowly, dragging its feet, its stiff arms rising —

“Riddikulus!” cried Parvati.

A bandage unraveled at the mummy’s feet; it became entangled, fell face forward, and its head rolled off.

“Seamus!” roared Professor Lupin.

Seamus darted past Parvati.

Crack! Where the mummy had been was a woman with floor-length black hair and a skeletal, green-tinged face — a banshee. She opened her mouth wide and an unearthly sound filled the room, a long, wailing shriek that made the hair on Harry’s head stand on end.

“Riddikulus!” shouted Seamus.

The banshee made a rasping noise and clutched her throat; her voice was gone.

Crack! The banshee turned into a rat, which chased its tail in a circle, then — *crack!* — became a rattlesnake, which slithered and writhed before — *crack!* — becoming a single, bloody eyeball.

“It’s confused!” shouted Lupin. “We’re getting there! Dean!”

Dean hurried forward.

Crack! The eyeball became a severed hand, which flipped over and began to creep along the floor like a crab.

“Riddikulus!” yelled Dean.

There was a snap, and the hand was trapped in a mousetrap.

“Excellent! Ron, you next!”

Ron leapt forward.

Crack!

Quite a few people screamed. A giant spider, six feet tall and covered in hair, was advancing on Ron, clicking its pincers menacingly. For a moment, Harry thought Ron had frozen. Then —

“*Riddikulus!*” bellowed Ron, and the spider’s legs vanished; it rolled over and over; Lavender Brown squealed and ran out of its way and it came to a halt at Harry’s feet. He raised his wand, ready, but —

“Here!” shouted Professor Lupin suddenly, hurrying forward.

Crack!

The legless spider had vanished. For a second, everyone looked wildly around to see where it was. Then they saw a silvery-white orb hanging in the air in front of Lupin, who said, “*Riddikulus!*” almost lazily.

Crack!

“Forward, Neville, and finish him off!” said Lupin as the boggart landed on the floor as a cockroach. *Crack!* Snape was back. This time Neville charged forward looking determined.

“*Riddikulus!*” he shouted, and they had a split second’s view of Snape in his lacy dress before Neville let out a great “Ha!” of laughter, and the boggart exploded, burst into a thousand tiny wisps of smoke, and was gone.

“Excellent!” cried Professor Lupin as the class broke into applause. “Excellent, Neville. Well done, everyone. . . . Let me see . . . five points to Gryffindor for every person to tackle the

boggart — ten for Neville because he did it twice . . . and five each to Hermione and Harry.”

“But I didn’t do anything,” said Harry.

“You and Hermione answered my questions correctly at the start of the class, Harry,” Lupin said lightly. “Very well, everyone, an excellent lesson. Homework, kindly read the chapter on boggarts and summarize it for me . . . to be handed in on Monday. That will be all.”

Talking excitedly, the class left the staffroom. Harry, however, wasn’t feeling cheerful. Professor Lupin had deliberately stopped him from tackling the boggart. Why? Was it because he’d seen Harry collapse on the train, and thought he wasn’t up to much? Had he thought Harry would pass out again?

But no one else seemed to have noticed anything.

“Did you see me take that banshee?” shouted Seamus.

“And the hand!” said Dean, waving his own around.

“And Snape in that hat!”

“And my mummy!”

“I wonder why Professor Lupin’s frightened of crystal balls?” said Lavender thoughtfully.

“That was the best Defense Against the Dark Arts lesson we’ve ever had, wasn’t it?” said Ron excitedly as they made their way back to the classroom to get their bags.

“He seems like a very good teacher,” said Hermione approvingly.

“But I wish I could have had a turn with the boggart —”

“What would it have been for you?” said Ron, sniggering. “A piece of homework that only got nine out of ten?”

Die Boggart in die Hangkas

Malfoy kom eers weer laat Donderdagoggend klas toe terwyl die Slibberins en Griffindors al halfpad deur hul dubbele Towerdrankieles is. Hy kom die kerker met 'n windmakerige stappie binne, sy regterarm is toegewikkel in verbande en vasgebind in 'n slinger, en hy maak, so dink Harry, asof hy 'n vreeslike stryd op heldhaftige wyse oorleef het.

"Hoe gaan dit, Draco?" vra Pansy Parkinson liefies. "Is dit baie seer?"

"Ja," sê Malfoy en grynslag dapper, maar Harry sien hoe hy vir Krabbe en Goliat knipoog toe Pansy wegkyk.

"Sit, sit," sê professor Snerp luiweg.

Harry en Ron trek skewebek vir mekaar; Snerp sou nie "sit, sit" gesê het as een van hulle laat was nie, hy sou vir hulle detensie gegee het. In Snerp se klas kom Malfoy egter nog altyd met alles weg; Snerp is hoof van Huis Slibberin en trek daardie studente onbeskaamd voor.

Vandag maak hulle 'n nuwe towerdrankie, 'n Krimp-oplossing. Malfoy sit sy hekseketel reg langs Harry en Ron s'n neer sodat hulle hul bestanddele op dieselfde tafel moet voorberei.

"Meneer," roep Malfoy uit, "meneer, ek het hulp nodig om hierdie margrietjiewortels op te sny, oor my arm —"

"Weasley, sny Malfoy se wortels vir hom op," sê Snerp sonder om op te kyk.

Ron word baksteenrooi.

"Jou arm makeer niks," sis hy vir Malfoy.

Malfoy grynslag oor die tafel vir hom.

"Weasley, jy't gehoor wat professor Snerp sê, sny daardie wortels op."

Ron gryp die mes, pluk Malfoy se wortels nader en begin hulle rof opkap sodat almal verskillende lengtes is.

"Professor," sê Malfoy dralend, "Weasley mors my wortels op, professor."

Snerp stap na hul tafel, tuur langs sy krom neus na die wortels, en gee toe vir Ron 'n onplesierige glimlag van onder sy lang, vetterige swart hare.

"Ruil wortels met Malfoy, Weasley."

"Maar meneer —!"

Ron het vir die laaste kwartier sy eie wortels versigtig in presies ewe groot stukkie gesny.

"Nou!" sê Snerp in sy gevaarlikste stem.

Ron stoot sy eie sorgvuldig gesnyde wortelstukkies oor die tafel na Malfoy en tel dan weer die mes op.

"En meneer, hierdie Krimpvly moet geskil word," sê Malfoy opsetlik, soos om die dik van die lag.

"Potter, jy kan Malfoy se Krimpvly skil," sê Snerp terwyl hy, soos altyd, vol genyn na Harry kyk.

Harry neem Malfoy se Krimpvly terwyl Ron sukkel om die skade aan die wortels wat hy nou moet gebruik, te verminder. Harry skil die Krimpvly so vinnig as wat hy kan en gooi dit sonder om 'n woord te sê oor die tafel na Malfoy toe. Malfoy se grynslag is nog breër as tevore.

"Jou pêl Hagrid onlangs gesien?" vra hy sag.

"Niks met jou uit te waai nie," sê Ron hortend en sonder om op te kyk.

"Ek is bevrees hy gaan nie veel langer 'n onderwyser wees nie," sê Malfoy in 'n stem wat vol gemaakte spyt is. "Vader is glad nie gelukkig oor my besering nie –"

"Hou aan praat, Malfoy, dan gee ek jou 'n regte besering," snou Ron hom toe.

"– hy't by die bestuursraad gaan kla. En by die Ministerie vir Towerkuns. Vader is 'n invloedryke man, weet jy. En 'n blywende besering soos dié –" hy slaak 'n groot, gemaakte sug, "wie weet of my arm ooit weer dieselfde sal wees?"

"Dit is dus hoekom jy so aansit," sê Harry en kap 'n dooie rusper se kop per ongeluk af, so bewee sy hand van woede. "Jy wil hê Hagrid moet sy werk verloor."

"Wel," sê Malfoy, en laat sak sy stem tot 'n fluistering, "deels, Potter, maar daar is ook ander voordele. Weasley, sny my ruspers vir my."

Neville, wat 'n paar hekseketels verder staan, is in die moeilikheid. Neville is gereeld tydens die Towerdrankie-les in die pekel; dit is sy swakste vak, en sy groot vrees vir professor Snerp maak dinge tien maal erger. Sy towerdrankie, wat veronderstel is om 'n helder suurgroen te wees, is –

"Oranje, Loggerenberg," sê Snerp terwyl hy daarvan opskep en dit terug in die hekseketel giet sodat almal kan sien. "Oranje. Sê my, seun, dring iets ooit daardie dik skedel van jou binne? Het jy nie gehoor toe ek baie duidelik gesê het dat net een rotmilt nodig is nie? Het ek dit nie baie eenvoudig gestel dat 'n skeutjie bloedsuiersap voldoende is nie? Wat moet ek doen om jou te laat verstaan, Loggerenberg?"

Neville is pienk en hy bewee. Dit lyk asof hy op die rand van tranes is.

"Asseblief, meneer," sê Hermien, "asseblief, ek sal vir Neville help om dit reg te maak –"

"Ek kan nie onthou dat ek jou gevra het om te spog nie, juffrou La

Grange," sê Snerp kil, en Hermien word net so pienk soos Neville. "Loggerenberg, aan die einde van die klas sal ons 'n paar druppels van daardie towerdrankie vir jou padda voer en kyk wat gebeur. Dalk sal dit jou aanmoedig om jou werk ordentlik te doen."

Snerp loop aan en laat vir Neville agter. Hy is asemloos van vrees.

"Help my!" kerm hy teenoor Hermien.

"Haai, Harry," sê Septimus Floris toe hy oorleun om Harry se bronskaal te leen, "het jy gehoor? Vanoggend in die *Daaglikse Profeet* – hulle reken Sirius Swardt is gesien."

"Waar?" sê Harry en Ron vinnig. Aan die ander kant van die tafel kyk Malfoy op en luister aandagtig.

"Nie ver van hier af nie," sê Septimus, wat opgewonde lyk. "Dis 'n Moggel wat hom gesien het. Sy weet natuurlik nie wat aangaan nie. Die Moggels dink hy's net 'n gewone misdadiger, nê. Sy't die blitslyn gebel. Teen die tyd dat die Ministerie vir Towerkuns daar aangekom het, was hy reeds weg."

"Nie ver van hier af nie . . ." herhaal Ron en kyk betekenisvol na Harry. Hy draai om en sien dat Malfoy hulle dophou. "Wat is dit, Malfoy? Het jy nog iets wat afgeskil moet word?"

Malfoy se oë skitter egter boosaardig, en hulle is vasgenaël op Harry. Hy leun oor die tafel.

"Jy dink seker daaraan om Swardt op eie houtjie te vang, hè, Potter?"

"Dis reg, ja," sê Harry ongeërg.

Malfoy se dun mond krul in 'n onderduimse glimlag.

"As dit nou *ek* was," sê hy sag, "het ek al lankal iets gedoen. Ek sal nie soos 'n soet seuntjie in die skool bly nie, ek sal daar buite wees en hom soek."

"Waarvan praat jy, Malfoy?" sê Ron skor.

"Weet jy dan nie, Potter?" blaas Malfoy en sy bleek oë vernou.

"Weet nie wat nie?"

Malfoy uiter 'n lae, smalende lag.

"Miskien wil jy liever nie jou nek waag nie," sê hy. "Dalk sal jy dit eerder vir die Dementors los, of wat praat ek alles? Dis net, as dit nou *ek* was, sou ek wraak neem. Ek sou hom persoonlik gaan soek."

"Waarvan praat jy tog?" sê Harry ergerlik, maar op daardie oomblik roep Snerp, "Teen hierdie tyd moet al die bestanddele bygevoeg wees. Hierdie towerdrankie moet 'n rukkie stowe voor dit gedrink kan word; ruim solank op terwyl dit prut en dan kan ons Loggerenberg s'n toets . . ."

Krabbe en Goliat lag openlik en kyk hoe Neville sweet terwyl hy sy towerdrankie koorsagtig roer. Hermien mompel bevele vanuit die hoek van haar mond, sodat Snerp dit nie moet agterkom nie. Harry en Ron pak hul ongebruikte bestanddele weg en gaan was dan hul hande en skeplepels in die klipwasbak in die hoek.

Wat bedoel Malfoy?" brom Harry teenoor Ron en hou sy hande onder die ysige straal water wat uit die drakekop se mond spuit. "Hoekom sal ek wraak op Swardt wil neem? Hy't my niks gedoen nie – nog nie."

"Hy suig dit uit sy duim," sê Ron verwoed, "hy wil hê jy moet iets doms aanvang."

Die einde van die les is in sig en Snerp stap na Neville wat langs sy heksetel wegkoes.

"Kom almal hier," sê Snerp en sy swart oë glinster, "en kyk wat met Loggerenberg se padda gebeur. As hy daarin geslaag het om 'n Krimp-oplossing te maak, dan sal sy padda in 'n paddavis verander. Indien hy iets verkeerd gedoen het, waaroor ek geen twyfel het nie, sal sy padda heel waarskynlik vergiftig wees."

Die Griffindors kyk angstig toe. Die Slibberins lyk opgewonde. Snerp tel Trevor die skurwepadda in sy linkerhand op en dompel 'n klein lepel-tjie in Neville se towerdrankie, wat nou groen is. Hy laat loop 'n paar druppels in Trevor se keel af.

Daar is 'n oomblik van gewyde stilte terwyl Trevor sluk; toe is daar 'n klein ploggeluidjie, en daar wriemel Trevor die paddavis in Snerp se palm.

Die Griffindors bars uit in 'n luide applous. Snerp, wat suur lyk, haal 'n klein botteltjie uit sy mantel se sak, laat val 'n paar druppels op Trevor en hy herverskyn meteens, lewensgroot.

"Griffindor verloor vyf punte," sê Snerp, en dit vee die glimlagte van almal se gesigte af. "Ek het gesê jy mag hom nie help nie, juffrou La Grange. Julle mag gaan."

Harry, Ron en Hermien klim die trappe uit na die ingangsportaal. Harry dink nog steeds na oor wat Malfoy gesê het, terwyl Ron briesend kwaad is vir Snerp.

"Griffindor verloor vyf punte omdat die towerdrankie werk! Hoekom het jy nie gejok nie, Hermien? Jy kon gesê het Neville het dit op sy eie gedoen!"

Hermien antwoord nie. Ron kyk om hom.

"Waar is sy?"

Harry kyk ook om. Hulle is reeds bo en kyk hoe die res van die klas verbystap op pad na die Groot Saal vir middagete.

"Sy was reg agter ons," sê Ron fronsend.

Malfoy kom verby hulle; hy loop tussen Krabbe en Goliat. Hy grinnik toe hy vir Harry sien.

"Daar is sy," sê Harry.

Hermien blaas effens toe sy met die trappe uitstorm; sy hou haar tas in haar een hand en dit lyk of sy met die ander hand iets onder haar mantel insteek.

"Hoe het jy dit gedoen?" vra Ron.

"Wat?" sê Hermien toe sy by hulle aansluit.

“Die een oomblik was jy reg agter ons, en die volgende oomblik is jy weer heel onder aan die voet van die trappe.”

“Wat?” sê Hermien en sy lyk ietwat verward. “O – ek moes teruggaan vir iets. Ag, nee . . .”

’n Naat in Hermien se tas het oopgebars. Harry is nie verbaas nie; hy sien daar is ten minste ’n dosyn groot, swaar boeke binne-in.

“Hoekom dra jy al daardie boeke saam met jou?” vra Ron vir haar.

“Jy weet tog hoeveel vakke ek neem,” sê Hermien uitasem. “Hou ’n bietjie vir my vas, asseblief, sal jy?”

“Maar –” Ron draai die boeke wat sy vir hom gegee het om en kyk na die omslae – “jy het nie een van hierdie vakke vandag nie. Dis nog net Verdediging teen die Donker Kunste vanmiddag.”

“O, ja,” sê Hermien vaag, maar sy pak al die boeke nog steeds terug in haar sak. “Ek hoop daars iets lekkers vir middagete, ek sterf van die honger,” voeg sy by terwyl sy na die Groot Saal toe aanstap.

“Kry jy ook so ’n gevoel dat daar iets is wat Hermien nie vir ons vertel nie?” vra Ron vir Harry.

Toe hulle vir die eerste les in Verdediging teen die Donker Kunste opdaag, is professor Lupin nie daar nie. Hulle gaan almal sit, haal hul boeke, veerpenne en perkament uit, en is aan die gesels toe hy uiteindelik opdaag. Lupin glimlag vaag en sit sy gehawende ou tas op die onderwyser se tafel neer. Hy lyk nog net so verwaarloos soos tevore, maar hy lyk gesonder as op die trein, nes of hy ’n slag of wat ordentlik geëet het.

“Goeiemiddag,” sê hy. “Sal julle asseblief jul boeke terugsit in julle tasse. Vandag gaan julle ’n praktiese les hê. Julle het net jul towerstawwe nodig.”

’n Paar mense kyk nuuskierig na mekaar terwyl die klas hul boeke wegpak. Hulle het nog nooit tevore ’n praktiese Verdediging teen die Donker Kunste-les gehad nie, tensy ’n mens die heuglike les van die vorige jaar kan bytel, toe hul vorige onderwyser ’n hok vol kabouters klas toe gebring en losgelaat het.

“Goed dan,” sê professor Lupin toe almal gereed is, “as julle my sal volg.”

Verward, maar ook geïnteresseerd, staan die klas op en volg professor Lupin uit die klaskamer. Hy lei hulle deur die verlate gang en om ’n hoek waar die eerste ding wat hulle sien, Nurks die poltergeist is. Hy dryf kop onderstebo in die lug en is besig om kougom in die naaste sleutelgat te druk.

Nurks kyk eers op toe professor Lupin twee tree van hom af is, toe wikkell hy sy omkrultone en begin sing.

“Lompe, logge Lupin,” sing Nurks. “Lompe, logge Lupin, lompe, logge Lupin –”

Hoewel hy meesal ongeskik en onbeheerbaar is, betoon Nurks gewoonlik 'n mate van respek teenoor die onderwysers. Almal kyk vinnig na professor Lupin om te sien wat hy gaan doen, maar tot hul verbasing glimlag hy steeds.

"Ek sal daardie gom uit die sleutelgat haal as ek jy is, Nurks," sê hy vriendelik. "Mnr. Fillis sal nie by sy besems kan kom nie."

Fillis is Hogwarts se opsigter. Hy is 'n kortgebakerde mislukte toewenaar wat voortdurend in 'n stryd met die studente gewikkel is, en inderdaad ook met Nurks. Nurks steur hom egter glad nie aan professor Lupin se woorde nie, behalwe om 'n groot aarbeiborrel te blaas.

Professor Lupin gee 'n klein suggie en haal sy towerstaf uit.

"Dit is 'n baie handige klein towerspreukie," sê hy oor sy skouer aan die klas. "Kyk asseblief mooi."

Hy lig die towersiaf tot op skouerhoogte, sê, "Waddiwasi!" en rig dit op Nurks.

Die stuk kougom skiet met die krag van 'n koeël uit die sleutelgat, en reguit op in Nurks se linkerneusgat. Nurks warrel die lug in en laat vluckend vat.

"Sjoe, meneer!" sê Dean Thomas bewonderend.

"Dankie, Dean," sê professor Lupin terwyl hy sy towerstaf wegsit. "Sal ons voortgaan?"

Toe hulle aanstap, kyk die klas met nuwe respek na die toingrige professor Lupin. Hy lei hulle met 'n tweede gang af en gaan staan net buite die personeelkamer se deur.

"Gaan in, asseblief," sê professor Lupin toe hy die deur oopmaak en terugtree.

Die personeelkamer is 'n lang vertrek met paneelwerk en dis vol ou toele wat nie by mekaar pas nie. Dit is leeg, buiten een onderwyser. Professor Snerp sit in 'n lae gemakstoel, en hy kyk om toe die klas inkom. Sy oë glinster en 'n honende laggie speel om sy mond. Toe professor Lupin instap en die deur agter hom wil toestoot, sê Snerp, "Los dit oop, Lupin, ek sal liewer nie toekyk nie." Hy kom orent en stryk verby die klas sodat sy swart kleed golwend agter hom warrel. In die deur draai hy op sy hak om en sê, "Dalk het niemand jou nog gewaarsku nie, Lupin, maar hierdie klas bevat ene Neville Loggerenberg. Ek raai jou aan om hom met niks ingewikkelds te vertrou nie, tensy juffrou La Grange instruksies in sy oor fluister."

Neville word skarlakenrooi. Harry gluur na Snerp, dit is erg genoeg dat hy vir Neville in sy eie klas boelie, wat nog te sê voor die ander onderwysers.

Professor Lupin lig sy wenkbroue.

"Ek het gehoop dat Neville my sal help met die eerste stadium van hierdie oefening," sê hy, "en ek is seker dat hy dit uitsonderlik goed sal doen."

Neville se gesig word, indien moontlik, nog rooier. Snerp se lip krul, maar hy stap uit en klap die deur toe.

“Nou toe nou,” sê Lupin en beduie dat die klas na die onderent van die vertrek moet gaan, waar daar net ’n ou hangkas is waarin die onderwysers hul ekstra mantels hou. Toe professor Lupin langs die kas gaan staan, wikkel dit skielik en kap teen die muur.

“Niks om julle oor te bekommer nie,” sê professor Lupin bedaard toe ’n paar mense van skrik agteruit spring. “Daar is ’n Boggart hier binne-in.”

Dit lyk of die meeste mense voel dat *dit* inderdaad iets is om jou oor te bekommer. Neville kyk beangs na professor Lupin en Septimus Floris staan vol misnoeë na die deurknop wat nou woes ratel.

“Boggarts hou van donker, geslote ruimtes,” sê professor Lupin. “Hangkaste, die ruimte onder beddens, die kas onder die wasbak – ek het een keer een teëgekom wat homself in ’n staanhorlosie tuis gemaak het. *Hier* – die een het gistermiddag ingetrek, en ek het die skoolhoof gevra of die personeel dit sal uitlos sodat my derdejaars ’n praktiese les kan hê.

“Dus is die eerste vraag wat ons onself afvra dit: wat is ’n Boggart?”

Hermien steek haar hand op.

“Dis ’n vormveranderaar,” sê sy. “Dit kan die vorm aanneem van wat dit ook al mag dink ons die bangste voor is.”

“Ek kon dit self nie beter gestel het nie,” sê professor Lupin, en Hermien straal. “Die Boggart wat dus in die donkerte daar binne sit, het nog nie ’n vorm aangeneem nie. Hy weet nog nie wat die persoon aan die ander kant van die deur bang sal maak nie. Niemand weet hoe ’n Boggart lyk wanneer hy alleen is nie, want sodra ek hom uitlaat, sal hy onmiddellik dit word waarvoor elkeen van ons die bangste is.

“Dit beteken,” sê professor Lupin, terwyl hy Neville se beangste gekug ignoreer, “dat ons ’n groot voordeel bo die Boggart het, selfs nog voor ons begin het. Weet jy wat dit is, Harry?”

Dis baie moeilik om ’n vraag te beantwoord as Hermien langs jou, met haar hand in die lug, op die punte van haar tone op en af spring, maar Harry probeer tog.

“H’m – omdat daar so baie van ons is, weet dit nie watter vorm dit moet wees nie?”

“Presies,” sê professor Lupin en Hermien laat haar hand sak en lyk ietwat bekaf. “Dit is altyd beter om geselskap te hê wanneer jy met ’n Boggart te doene het. Hy raak verward. Wat moet hy wees, ’n koplose lyk of ’n vleisetende slak? Ek het eenkeer gesien hoe ’n Boggart presies daardie fout maak – het probeer om twee mense tegelykertyd die skrik op die lyf te jaag en verander homself toe in ’n halwe slak. Nie in die minste angswekkend nie.

“Die towerspreuk wat ’n Boggart sal afskrik, is baie eenvoudig, maar

dit benodig groot sterkte van gees. Julle sien, 'n Boggart kan dit nie ver-
dra om uitgelag te word nie. Wat jy moet doen, is om dit te dwing om 'n
vorm aan te neem wat vir jou snaaks is.

"Ons sal die towerspreuk aanvanklik sonder towerstawwe oefen. Ag-
ter my aan, asseblief . . . riddikulus!"

"Riddikulus!" sê die klas tesame.

"Mooi so," sê professor Lupin. "Baie goed, maar ek is bevrees dat dit
die maklike deel is. Julle sien, die towerwoord alleen is nie genoeg nie.
In dit is waar jy in die prentjie kom, Neville."

Die hangkas skud weer, maar nie so erg soos Neville nie. Hy stap vo-
rentoe asof hy na die galg gestuur is.

"Reg, Neville," sê professor Lupin. "In die eerste plek: wat sal jy sê is
die ding in die wêreld waarvoor jy die bangste is?"

Neville se lippe beweeg, maar nie 'n woord kom uit nie.

"Kon nie hoor nie, Neville, jammer," sê professor Lupin vrolik.

Neville kyk wildweg om hom, nes of hy iemand smeek om hom te
help. Toe sê hy in skaars meer as 'n fluisterstem, "Professor Snerp."

Almal lag. Selfs Neville grinnik verskonend. Professor Lupin
lyk egter ingedagte.

"Professor Snerp . . . h'm . . . Neville, ek verneem jy woon by jou
ouma?"

"H'm – ja," sê Neville senuagtig, "maar – ek wil liever ook nie hê dat
die Boggart in haar moet verander nie."

"Nee, nee, jy verstaan my verkeerd," sê professor Lupin, nou met 'n
glimlag. "Ek wonder of jy my kan sê watter soort klere jou ouma ge-
woonlik dra?"

Neville lyk oorbluf, maar hy sê, "Wel . . . altyd dieselfde hoed: 'n Lange
met 'n opgestopte aasvoël bo-op. En 'n lang rok . . . meesal groen . . . en
partykeer 'n jakkalspels."

"En 'n handsak?" sê professor Lupin hom voor.

"'n Groot rooie," sê Neville.

"Goed dan," sê professor Lupin. "Kan jy jou hierdie klere goed voor-
stel, Neville? Kan jy hulle in jou gedagtes sien?"

"Ja," sê Neville onseker en dis duidelik dat hy wonder wat volgende
gaan gebeur.

"Wanneer die Boggart uit hierdie hangkas bars, Neville, en jou sien, sal
hy dadelik die vorm van professor Snerp aanneem," sê Lupin. "Dan moet
jy jou towerstaf lig – so – en uitroep 'Riddikulus!' – en hard op jou ouma
se klere konsentreer. As alles goed gaan, sal professor Boggart Snerp ge-
dwing word om daardie aasvoëlhoed, daardie groen rok en daardie rooi
handsak aan te trek."

Daar is 'n geskree soos almal lag. Die hangkas wikkkel nog erger heen
en weer.

“As Neville dit regkry, sal die Boggart sy aandag op elkeen van ons op die beurt af toespits,” sê professor Lupin. “Ek wil hê julle moet almal ’n rukkie neem om te dink aan die ding wat jou die bangste maak, en jou indink hoe jy dit gaan dwing om belaglik te lyk . . .”

Die vertrek word stil. Harry dink . . . Wat maak hom die bangste in die wêreld?

Sy eerste gedagte is die heer Woldemort – ’n Woldemort in al sy krag. Voor hy egter ’n teenaanval op die Boggart-Woldemort kan begin beplan, doem ’n aaklige beeld voor hom op . . .

’n Verrottende, glinsterende hand wat onder ’n swart kleed inglip . . . ’n lang, roggelende asemteug uit ’n onsigbare mond . . . en toe ’n koue so deurdringend dat dit voel of jy verdrink . . .

Harry sidder, en kyk toe vinnig rond in die hoop dat niemand iets gemerk het nie. Baie mense se oë is toe. Ron mompel binnensmonds, “Breek sy bene af.” Harry dink hy weet waaroor dit gaan. Ron is die bangste van alles vir spinnekoppe.

“Is almal gereed?” sê professor Lupin.

Harry voel hoe hy ruk van vrees. Hy is nie gereed nie. Hoe maak ’n mens ’n Dementor minder vreesaanjaend? Hy wil egter nie vir meer tyd vra nie; al die ander knik en rol hul moue op.

“Neville, ons gaan terugstaan,” sê professor Lupin. “Dan is niemand in jou pad nie, nè. Ek sal die volgende persoon vorentoe roep . . . almal nou terug, sodat Neville kan beweeg –”

Hulle val almal terug tot hul rûe teen die mure is en Neville alleen langs die hangkas staan. Hy lyk bleek en bang, maar hy het sy mantel se moue opgerol en hou sy towerstaf gereed.

“Op die telling van drie, Neville,” sê professor Lupin wat sy eie towerstaf op die deurknop voor teen die kas gerig hou. “Een – twee – drie – nou!”

’n Straal vonke spat uit die punt van professor Lupin se towerstaf en tref die deurknop. Die hangkas bars oop. Professor Snerp tree dreigend uit, haakneus en al, en sy oë blits na Neville.

Neville val terug, sy towerstaf voor hom, en sy mond gaap woordeloos. Snerp pyl op hom af terwyl hy sy hand onder sy mantel insteek.

“R-r-riddikulus!” piep Neville.

Daar is ’n geluid soos ’n sweep wat klap. Snerp struikel; hy dra ’n lang rok met kant en valletjies, ’n tamaai hoed versier met ’n motgevrete aasvoël en ’n yslike rooi handsak swaai aan sy hand.

Daar is ’n gebrul soos almal lag; die Boggart steek vas, verward, en professor Lupin skreeu, “Parvati! Vorentoe!”

Parvati tree vorentoe, haar gesig strak. Snerp wend hom na haar. Daar is nog ’n klapgeluid, en waar hy was, staan ’n bloedbesmeerde mummie wat in verbande toegedraai is; die gesiglose kop is na Parvati gedraai en

dit begin na haar loop, baie stadig en met slepende voete, die stywe arms word gelig –

“Riddikulus!” gil Parvati.

’n Verband by die mummie se voete gaan los en begin afrol; die mummie word geknoop, val gesig eerste vooroor en die kop rol eenkant toe.

“Septimus!” brul professor Lupin.

Septimus storm verby Parvati.

Klap! Waar die mummie was, staan ’n vrou met swart hare wat tot op die grond hang en met ’n skeletagtige, groen gesig – ’n doodsode. Sy maak haar mond wyd oop en ’n onaardse geluid vul die vertrek, ’n lang, lormende kreet wat die hare op Harry se kop laat rys –

“Riddikulus!” skree Septimus.

Die doodsode maak ’n skor geluid en gryp na haar keel; haar stem is weg.

Klap! Die doodsode verander in ’n rot wat sy stert in ’n sirkel jaag – klap! – dit word ’n ratelslang wat wriemel en wring voor dit – klap! – in ’n enkele, bloederige oogbal verander.

“Hy’s deurmekaar!” roep Lupin uit. “Dis net wat ons wil hê! Dean!”

Dean haas hom vorentoe.

Klap! Die oogbal word ’n afgekapte hand wat omwip en soos ’n krap oor die vloer kruip.

“Riddikulus!” gil Dean.

Daar is ’n klapgeluid, en die hand is in ’n muisval gevang.

“Uitstekend! Ron, volgende!”

Ron spring vorentoe.

Klap!

’n Hele paar mense skree. ’n Reusespinnekop, twee meter lank en bedek met hare, pyl op Ron af met knypers wat dreigend klik. Vir ’n oomblik dink Harry dat Ron versteen het. Toe –

“Riddikulus!” bulder Ron, en die spinnekop se pote verdwyn. Dit rol om en om, Hildegard Braun gil en hardloop uit die pad, en dit rol tot voor Harry se voete. Hy lig sy towerstaf, gereed, maar –

“Hier!” roep professor Lupin skielik en storm vorentoe.

Klap!

Die pootlose spinnekop verdwyn. Vir ’n oomblik kyk almal wild rond om te sien waar dit is. Toe sien hulle ’n silwerwit skyf in die lug voor Lupin wat amper luiweg “Riddikulus!” sê.

Klap!

“Kom, Neville, speel klaar met hom!” sê Lupin toe die Boggart in die vorm van ’n kakkerlak op die grond val. Klap! Snerp is terug. Hierdie keer storm Neville vasberade vorentoe.

“Riddikulus!” skree hy en vir ’n breukdeel van ’n sekonde sien hulle vir Snerp in sy kantrok, net toe Neville ’n groot “Ha!” los soos hy lag, sodat

die Boggart ontplof, in 'n duisend klein wolkies rook spat, en verdwyn.

"Uitstekend!" gil professor Lupin toe die klas vir Neville luidkeels toejuig. "Uitstekend, Neville. Welgedaan, julle almal. Laat ek sien . . . vyf punte vir Griffindor vir elkeen wat die Boggart getakel het – tien vir Neville omdat hy dit twee keer gedoen het – en vyf vir Harry en Hermien elk."

"Ek het niks gedoen nie," sê Harry.

"Jy en Hermien het my vrae aan die begin van die les korrek beantwoord, Harry," sê Lupin ligtelik. "Baie mooi, julle almal, 'n uitstekende les. Huiswerk, lees asseblief die hoofstuk oor Boggarts en som dit vir my op . . . dit moet Maandag ingehandig word. Dit is al."

Toe die klas die personeelkamer verlaat, praat almal opgewonde saam. Harry voel egter nie so opgewek nie. Professor Lupin het met opset gekeer dat hy die Boggart takel. Hoekom? Is dit omdat hy gesien het toe Harry op die trein inmekaarstort, en dink hy dat Harry nie tot veel in staat is nie? Was hy bang dat Harry weer flou sal word?

Dit lyk egter asof niemand anders iets gemerk het nie.

"Het julle gesien hoe vat ek daardie doodsboe aan?" skree Septimus.

"En die hand!" sê Dean en waai sy eie rond.

"En Snerp in daardie hoed!"

"En my mummie!"

"Ek wonder hoekom professor Lupin bang is vir kristalballe?" sê Hildegard ingedagte.

"Dit was die beste les vir Verdediging teen die Donker Kunste wat ons nog gehad het, of hoe?" sê Ron opgewonde toe hulle terugstap na die klaskamer om hul tasse te gaan haal.

"Hy lyk na 'n baie goeie onderwyser," sê Hermien goedkeurend. "Ek wens net ek het ook 'n beurt met daardie Boggart gehad –"

"Wat sou dit nogal vir jou geword het?" vra Ron smalend. "n Stuk huiswerk waarvoor jy net nege uit tien gekry het, of wat?"

CHAPTER EIGHT



FLIGHT OF THE FAT LADY

In no time at all, Defense Against the Dark Arts had become most people's favorite class. Only Draco Malfoy and his gang of Slytherins had anything bad to say about Professor Lupin.

"Look at the state of his robes," Malfoy would say in a loud whisper as Professor Lupin passed. "He dresses like our old house-elf."

But no one else cared that Professor Lupin's robes were patched and frayed. His next few lessons were just as interesting as the first. After boggarts, they studied Red Caps, nasty little goblinlike creatures that lurked wherever there had been bloodshed: in the dungeons of castles and the potholes of deserted battlefields, waiting to bludgeon those who had gotten lost. From Red Caps they moved

on to kappas, creepy water-dwellers that looked like scaly monkeys, with webbed hands itching to strangle unwitting waders in their ponds.

Harry only wished he was as happy with some of his other classes. Worst of all was Potions. Snape was in a particularly vindictive mood these days, and no one was in any doubt why. The story of the boggart assuming Snape's shape, and the way that Neville had dressed it in his grandmother's clothes, had traveled through the school like wildfire. Snape didn't seem to find it funny. His eyes flashed menacingly at the very mention of Professor Lupin's name, and he was bullying Neville worse than ever.

Harry was also growing to dread the hours he spent in Professor Trelawney's stifling tower room, deciphering lopsided shapes and symbols, trying to ignore the way Professor Trelawney's enormous eyes filled with tears every time she looked at him. He couldn't like Professor Trelawney, even though she was treated with respect bordering on reverence by many of the class. Parvati Patil and Lavender Brown had taken to haunting Professor Trelawney's tower room at lunchtimes, and always returned with annoyingly superior looks on their faces, as though they knew things the others didn't. They had also started using hushed voices whenever they spoke to Harry, as though he were on his deathbed.

Nobody really liked Care of Magical Creatures, which, after the action-packed first class, had become extremely dull. Hagrid seemed to have lost his confidence. They were now spending lesson after lesson learning how to look after flobberworms, which had to be some of the most boring creatures in existence.

“Why would anyone *bother* looking after them?” said Ron, after yet another hour of poking shredded lettuce down the flobberworms’ slimy throats.

At the start of October, however, Harry had something else to occupy him, something so enjoyable it more than made up for his unsatisfactory classes. The Quidditch season was approaching, and Oliver Wood, Captain of the Gryffindor team, called a meeting one Thursday evening to discuss tactics for the new season.

There were seven people on a Quidditch team: three Chasers, whose job it was to score goals by putting the Quaffle (a red, soccer-sized ball) through one of the fifty-foot-high hoops at each end of the field; two Beaters, who were equipped with heavy bats to repel the Bludgers (two heavy black balls that zoomed around trying to attack the players); a Keeper, who defended the goalposts, and the Seeker, who had the hardest job of all, that of catching the Golden Snitch, a tiny, winged, walnut-sized ball, whose capture ended the game and earned the Seeker’s team an extra one hundred and fifty points.

Oliver Wood was a burly seventeen-year-old, now in his seventh and final year at Hogwarts. There was a quiet sort of desperation in his voice as he addressed his six fellow team members in the chilly locker rooms on the edge of the darkening Quidditch field.

“This is our last chance — *my* last chance — to win the Quidditch Cup,” he told them, striding up and down in front of them. “I’ll be leaving at the end of this year. I’ll never get another shot at it.

“Gryffindor hasn’t won for seven years now. Okay, so we’ve had the worst luck in the world — injuries — then the tournament getting called off last year. . . .” Wood swallowed, as though the memory

still brought a lump to his throat. "But we also know we've got the *best = ruddy = team = in = the = school*," he said, punching a fist into his other hand, the old manic glint back in his eye.

"We've got three *superb* Chasers."

Wood pointed at Alicia Spinnet, Angelina Johnson, and Katie Bell.

"We've got two *unbeatable* Beaters."

"Stop it, Oliver, you're embarrassing us," said Fred and George Weasley together, pretending to blush.

"And we've got a Seeker who has *never failed to win us a match!*" Wood rumbled, glaring at Harry with a kind of furious pride.

"And me," he added as an afterthought.

"We think you're very good too, Oliver," said George.

"Spanking good Keeper," said Fred.

"The point is," Wood went on, resuming his pacing, "the Quidditch Cup should have had our name on it these last two years. Ever since Harry joined the team, I've thought the thing was in the bag. But we haven't got it, and this year's the last chance we'll get to finally see our name on the thing. . . ."

Wood spoke so dejectedly that even Fred and George looked sympathetic.

"Oliver, this year's our year," said Fred.

"We'll do it, Oliver!" said Angelina.

"Definitely," said Harry.

Full of determination, the team started training sessions, three evenings a week. The weather was getting colder and wetter, the nights darker, but no amount of mud, wind, or rain could tarnish Harry's wonderful vision of finally winning the huge, silver

Quidditch Cup.

Harry returned to the Gryffindor common room one evening after training, cold and stiff but pleased with the way practice had gone, to find the room buzzing excitedly.

“What’s happened?” he asked Ron and Hermione, who were sitting in two of the best chairs by the fireside and completing some star charts for Astronomy.

“First Hogsmeade weekend,” said Ron, pointing at a notice that had appeared on the battered old bulletin board. “End of October. Halloween.”

“Excellent,” said Fred, who had followed Harry through the portrait hole. “I need to visit Zonko’s. I’m nearly out of Stink Pellets.”

Harry threw himself into a chair beside Ron, his high spirits ebbing away. Hermione seemed to read his mind.

“Harry, I’m sure you’ll be able to go next time,” she said. “They’re bound to catch Black soon. He’s been sighted once already.”

“Black’s not fool enough to try anything in Hogsmeade,” said Ron. “Ask McGonagall if you can go this time, Harry. The next one might not be for ages —”

“*Ron!*” said Hermione. “Harry’s supposed to stay *in school* —”

“He can’t be the only third year left behind,” said Ron. “Ask McGonagall, go on, Harry —”

“Yeah, I think I will,” said Harry, making up his mind.

Hermione opened her mouth to argue, but at that moment Crookshanks leapt lightly onto her lap. A large, dead spider was dangling from his mouth.

“Does he have to eat that in front of us?” said Ron, scowling.

“Clever Crookshanks, did you catch that all by yourself?” said Hermione.

Crookshanks slowly chewed up the spider, his yellow eyes fixed insolently on Ron.

“Just keep him over there, that’s all,” said Ron irritably, turning back to his star chart. “I’ve got Scabbers asleep in my bag.”

Harry yawned. He really wanted to go to bed, but he still had his own star chart to complete. He pulled his bag toward him, took out parchment, ink, and quill, and started work.

“You can copy mine, if you like,” said Ron, labeling his last star with a flourish and shoving the chart toward Harry.

Hermione, who disapproved of copying, pursed her lips but didn’t say anything. Crookshanks was still staring unblinkingly at Ron, flicking the end of his bushy tail. Then, without warning, he pounced.

“OY!” Ron roared, seizing his bag as Crookshanks sank four sets of claws deeply into it and began tearing ferociously. “GET OFF, YOU STUPID ANIMAL!”

Ron tried to pull the bag away from Crookshanks, but Crookshanks clung on, spitting and slashing.

“Ron, don’t hurt him!” squealed Hermione; the whole common room was watching; Ron whirled the bag around; Crookshanks still clinging to it, and Scabbers came flying out of the top —

“CATCH THAT CAT!” Ron yelled as Crookshanks freed himself from the remnants of the bag, sprang over the table, and chased after the terrified Scabbers.

George Weasley made a lunge for Crookshanks but missed;

Scabbers streaked through twenty pairs of legs and shot beneath an old chest of drawers. Crookshanks skidded to a halt, crouched low on his bandy legs, and started making furious swipes beneath it with his front paw.

Ron and Hermione hurried over; Hermione grabbed Crookshanks around the middle and heaved him away; Ron threw himself onto his stomach and, with great difficulty, pulled Scabbers out by the tail.

“Look at him!” he said furiously to Hermione, dangling Scabbers in front of her. “He’s skin and bone! You keep that cat away from him!”

“Crookshanks doesn’t understand it’s wrong!” said Hermione, her voice shaking. “All cats chase rats, Ron!”

“There’s something funny about that animal!” said Ron, who was trying to persuade a frantically wiggling Scabbers back into his pocket. “It heard me say that Scabbers was in my bag!”

“Oh, what rubbish,” said Hermione impatiently. “Crookshanks could *smell* him, Ron, how else d’you think —”

“That cat’s got it in for Scabbers!” said Ron, ignoring the people around him, who were starting to giggle. “And Scabbers was here first, *and* he’s ill!”

Ron marched through the common room and out of sight up the stairs to the boys’ dormitories.

Ron was still in a bad mood with Hermione next day. He barely talked to her all through Herbology, even though he, Harry, and Hermione were working together on the same puffapod.

“How’s Scabbers?” Hermione asked timidly as they stripped fat

pink pods from the plants and emptied the shining beans into a wooden pail.

“He’s hiding at the bottom of my bed, shaking,” said Ron angrily, missing the pail and scattering beans over the greenhouse floor.

“Careful, Weasley, careful!” cried Professor Sprout as the beans burst into bloom before their very eyes.

They had Transfiguration next. Harry, who had resolved to ask Professor McGonagall after the lesson whether he could go into Hogsmeade with the rest, joined the line outside the class trying to decide how he was going to argue his case. He was distracted, however, by a disturbance at the front of the line.

Lavender Brown seemed to be crying. Parvati had her arm around her and was explaining something to Seamus Finnigan and Dean Thomas, who were looking very serious.

“What’s the matter, Lavender?” said Hermione anxiously as she, Harry, and Ron went to join the group.

“She got a letter from home this morning,” Parvati whispered. “It’s her rabbit, Binky. He’s been killed by a fox.”

“Oh,” said Hermione, “I’m sorry, Lavender.”

“I should have known!” said Lavender tragically. “You know what day it is?”

“Er —”

“The sixteenth of October! ‘That thing you’re dreading, it will happen on the sixteenth of October!’ Remember? She was right, she was right!”

The whole class was gathered around Lavender now. Seamus shook his head seriously. Hermione hesitated; then she said, “You —

you were dreading Binky being killed by a fox?"

"Well, not necessarily by a *fox*," said Lavender, looking up at Hermione with streaming eyes, "but I was *obviously* dreading him dying, wasn't I?"

"Oh," said Hermione. She paused again. Then —

"Was Binky an *old* rabbit?"

"N-no!" sobbed Lavender. "H-he was only a baby!"

Parvati tightened her arm around Lavender's shoulders.

"But then, why would you dread him dying?" said Hermione.

Parvati glared at her.

"Well, look at it logically," said Hermione, turning to the rest of the group. "I mean, Binky didn't even die today, did he? Lavender just got the news today" — Lavender wailed loudly — "and she *can't* have been dreading it, because it's come as a real shock —"

"Don't mind Hermione, Lavender," said Ron loudly, "she doesn't think other people's pets matter very much."

Professor McGonagall opened the classroom door at that moment, which was perhaps lucky; Hermione and Ron were looking daggers at each other, and when they got into class, they seated themselves on either side of Harry and didn't talk to each other for the whole class.

Harry still hadn't decided what he was going to say to Professor McGonagall when the bell rang at the end of the lesson, but it was she who brought up the subject of Hogsmeade first.

"One moment, please!" she called as the class made to leave. "As you're all in my House, you should hand Hogsmeade permission forms to me before Halloween. No form, no visiting the village, so don't forget!"

Neville put up his hand.

“Please, Professor, I — I think I’ve lost —”

“Your grandmother sent yours to me directly, Longbottom,” said Professor McGonagall. “She seemed to think it was safer. Well, that’s all, you may leave.”

“Ask her now,” Ron hissed at Harry.

“Oh, but —” Hermione began.

“Go for it, Harry,” said Ron stubbornly.

Harry waited for the rest of the class to disappear, then headed nervously for Professor McGonagall’s desk.

“Yes, Potter?”

Harry took a deep breath.

“Professor, my aunt and uncle — er — forgot to sign my form,” he said.

Professor McGonagall looked over her square spectacles at him but didn’t say anything.

“So — er — d’you think it would be all right — I mean, will it be okay if I — if I go to Hogsmeade?”

Professor McGonagall looked down and began shuffling papers on her desk.

“I’m afraid not, Potter,” she said. “You heard what I said. No form, no visiting the village. That’s the rule.”

“But — Professor, my aunt and uncle — you know, they’re Muggles, they don’t really understand about — about Hogwarts forms and stuff,” Harry said, while Ron egged him on with vigorous nods. “If you said I could go —”

“But I don’t say so,” said Professor McGonagall, standing up and piling her papers neatly into a drawer. “The form clearly states that the parent or guardian must give permission.” She turned to look at him, with an odd expression on her face. Was it pity? “I’m sorry, Potter, but that’s my final word. You had better hurry, or you’ll be late for your next lesson.”

There was nothing to be done. Ron called Professor McGonagall a lot of names that greatly annoyed Hermione; Hermione assumed an “all-for-the-best” expression that made Ron even angrier, and Harry had to endure everyone in the class talking loudly and happily about what they were going to do first, once they got into Hogsmeade.

“There’s always the feast,” said Ron, in an effort to cheer Harry up. “You know, the Halloween feast, in the evening.”

“Yeah,” said Harry gloomily, “great.”

The Halloween feast was always good, but it would taste a lot better if he was coming to it after a day in Hogsmeade with everyone else. Nothing anyone said made him feel any better about being left behind. Dean Thomas, who was good with a quill, had offered to forge Uncle Vernon’s signature on the form, but as Harry had already told Professor McGonagall he hadn’t had it signed, that was no good. Ron halfheartedly suggested the Invisibility Cloak, but Hermione stamped on that one, reminding Ron what Dumbledore had told them about the dementors being able to see through them. Percy had what were possibly the least helpful words of comfort.

“They make a fuss about Hogsmeade, but I assure you, Harry, it’s not all it’s cracked up to be,” he said seriously. “All right, the

sweetshop's rather good, and Zonko's Joke Shop's frankly dangerous, and yes, the Shrieking Shack's always worth a visit, but really, Harry, apart from that, you're not missing anything."

On Halloween morning, Harry awoke with the rest and went down to breakfast, feeling thoroughly depressed, though doing his best to act normally.

"We'll bring you lots of sweets back from Honeydukes," said Hermione, looking desperately sorry for him.

"Yeah, loads," said Ron. He and Hermione had finally forgotten their squabble about Crookshanks in the face of Harry's disappointment.

"Don't worry about me," said Harry, in what he hoped was an offhand voice, "I'll see you at the feast. Have a good time."

He accompanied them to the entrance hall, where Filch, the caretaker, was standing inside the front doors, checking off names against a long list, peering suspiciously into every face, and making sure that no one was sneaking out who shouldn't be going.

"Staying here, Potter?" shouted Malfoy, who was standing in line with Crabbe and Goyle. "Scared of passing the dementors?"

Harry ignored him and made his solitary way up the marble staircase, through the deserted corridors, and back to Gryffindor Tower.

"Password?" said the Fat Lady, jerking out of a doze.

"Fortuna Major," said Harry listlessly.

The portrait swung open and he climbed through the hole into the common room. It was full of chattering first and second years, and a

few older students, who had obviously visited Hogsmeade so often the novelty had worn off.

“Harry! Harry! Hi, Harry!”

It was Colin Creevey, a second year who was deeply in awe of Harry and never missed an opportunity to speak to him.

“Aren’t you going to Hogsmeade, Harry? Why not? Hey” — Colin looked eagerly around at his friends — “you can come and sit with us, if you like, Harry!”

“Er — no, thanks, Colin,” said Harry, who wasn’t in the mood to have a lot of people staring avidly at the scar on his forehead. “I — I’ve got to go to the library, got to get some work done.”

After that, he had no choice but to turn right around and head back out of the portrait hole again.

“What was the point waking me up?” the Fat Lady called grumpily after him as he walked away.

Harry wandered dispiritedly toward the library, but halfway there he changed his mind; he didn’t feel like working. He turned around and came face-to-face with Filch, who had obviously just seen off the last of the Hogsmeade visitors.

“What are you doing?” Filch snarled suspiciously.

“Nothing,” said Harry truthfully.

“Nothing!” spat Filch, his jowls quivering unpleasantly. “A likely story! Sneaking around on your own — why aren’t you in Hogsmeade buying Stink Pellets and Belch Powder and Whizzing Worms like the rest of your nasty little friends?”

Harry shrugged.

“Well, get back to your common room where you belong!” snapped

Filch, and he stood glaring until Harry had passed out of sight.

But Harry didn't go back to the common room; he climbed a staircase, thinking vaguely of visiting the Owlery to see Hedwig, and was walking along another corridor when a voice from inside one of the rooms said, "Harry?"

Harry doubled back to see who had spoken and met Professor Lupin, looking around his office door.

"What are you doing?" said Lupin, though in a very different voice from Filch. "Where are Ron and Hermione?"

"Hogsmeade," said Harry, in a would-be casual voice.

"Ah," said Lupin. He considered Harry for a moment. "Why don't you come in? I've just taken delivery of a grindylow for our next lesson."

"A what?" said Harry.

He followed Lupin into his office. In the corner stood a very large tank of water. A sickly green creature with sharp little horns had its face pressed against the glass, pulling faces and flexing its long, spindly fingers.

"Water demon," said Lupin, surveying the grindylow thoughtfully. "We shouldn't have much difficulty with him, not after the kappas. The trick is to break his grip. You notice the abnormally long fingers? Strong, but very brittle."

The grindylow bared its green teeth and then buried itself in a tangle of weeds in a corner.

"Cup of tea?" Lupin said, looking around for his kettle. "I was just thinking of making one."

"All right," said Harry awkwardly.

Lupin tapped the kettle with his wand and a blast of steam issued suddenly from the spout.

“Sit down,” said Lupin, taking the lid off a dusty tin. “I’ve only got teabags, I’m afraid — but I daresay you’ve had enough of tea leaves?”

Harry looked at him. Lupin’s eyes were twinkling.

“How did you know about that?” Harry asked.

“Professor McGonagall told me,” said Lupin, passing Harry a chipped mug of tea. “You’re not worried, are you?”

“No,” said Harry.

He thought for a moment of telling Lupin about the dog he’d seen in Magnolia Crescent but decided not to. He didn’t want Lupin to think he was a coward, especially since Lupin already seemed to think he couldn’t cope with a boggart.

Something of Harry’s thoughts seemed to have shown on his face, because Lupin said, “Anything worrying you, Harry?”

“No,” Harry lied. He drank a bit of tea and watched the grindylow brandishing a fist at him. “Yes,” he said suddenly, putting his tea down on Lupin’s desk. “You know that day we fought the boggart?”

“Yes,” said Lupin slowly.

“Why didn’t you let me fight it?” said Harry abruptly.

Lupin raised his eyebrows.

“I would have thought that was obvious, Harry,” he said, sounding surprised.

Harry, who had expected Lupin to deny that he’d done any such thing, was taken aback.

“Why?” he said again.

“Well,” said Lupin, frowning slightly, “I assumed that if the boggart faced you, it would assume the shape of Lord Voldemort.”

Harry stared. Not only was this the last answer he’d expected, but Lupin had said Voldemort’s name. The only person Harry had ever heard say the name aloud (apart from himself) was Professor Dumbledore.

“Clearly, I was wrong,” said Lupin, still frowning at Harry. “But I didn’t think it a good idea for Lord Voldemort to materialize in the staffroom. I imagined that people would panic.”

“But then,” said Harry honestly. “I — I remembered those dementors.”

“I see,” said Lupin thoughtfully. “Well, well . . . I’m impressed.” He smiled slightly at the look of surprise on Harry’s face. “That suggests that what you fear most of all is — fear. Very wise, Harry.”

Harry didn’t know what to say to that, so he drank some more tea.

“So you’ve been thinking that I didn’t believe you capable of fighting the boggart?” said Lupin shrewdly.

“Well . . . yeah,” said Harry. He was suddenly feeling a lot happier. “Professor Lupin, you know the dementors —”

He was interrupted by a knock on the door.

“Come in,” called Lupin.

The door opened, and in came Snape. He was carrying a goblet, which was smoking faintly, and stopped at the sight of Harry, his black eyes narrowing.

“Ah, Severus,” said Lupin, smiling. “Thanks very much. Could you leave it here on the desk for me?”

Snape set down the smoking goblet, his eyes wandering between Harry and Lupin.

“I was just showing Harry my grindylow,” said Lupin pleasantly, pointing at the tank.

“Fascinating,” said Snape, without looking at it. “You should drink that directly, Lupin.”

“Yes, yes, I will,” said Lupin.

“I made an entire cauldronful,” Snape continued. “If you need more.”

“I should probably take some again tomorrow. Thanks very much, Severus.”

“Not at all,” said Snape, but there was a look in his eye Harry didn’t like. He backed out of the room, unsmiling and watchful.

Harry looked curiously at the goblet. Lupin smiled.

“Professor Snape has very kindly concocted a potion for me,” he said. “I have never been much of a potion-brewer and this one is particularly complex.” He picked up the goblet and sniffed it. “Pity sugar makes it useless,” he added, taking a sip and shuddering.

“Why — ?” Harry began. Lupin looked at him and answered the unfinished question.

“I’ve been feeling a bit off-color,” he said. “This potion is the only thing that helps. I am very lucky to be working alongside Professor Snape; there aren’t many wizards who are up to making it.”

Professor Lupin took another sip and Harry had a crazy urge to knock the goblet out of his hands.

“Professor Snape’s very interested in the Dark Arts,” he blurted out.

“Really?” said Lupin, looking only mildly interested as he took another gulp of potion.

“Some people reckon —” Harry hesitated, then plunged recklessly on, “some people reckon he’d do anything to get the Defense Against the Dark Arts job.”

Lupin drained the goblet and pulled a face.

“Disgusting,” he said. “Well, Harry, I’d better get back to work. I’ll see you at the feast later.”

“Right,” said Harry, putting down his empty teacup.

The empty goblet was still smoking.

“There you go,” said Ron. “We got as much as we could carry.”

A shower of brilliantly colored sweets fell into Harry’s lap. It was dusk, and Ron and Hermione had just turned up in the common room, pink-faced from the cold wind and looking as though they’d had the time of their lives.

“Thanks,” said Harry, picking up a packet of tiny black Pepper Imps. “What’s Hogsmeade like? Where did you go?”

By the sound of it — everywhere. Dervish and Banges, the wizarding equipment shop, Zonko’s Joke Shop, into the Three Broomsticks for foaming mugs of hot butterbeer, and many places besides.

“The post office, Harry! About two hundred owls, all sitting on shelves, all color-coded depending on how fast you want your letter to get there!”

“Honeydukes has got a new kind of fudge, they were giving out free samples, there’s a bit, look —”

“We *think* we saw an ogre, honestly, they get all sorts at the Three Broomsticks —”

“Wish we could have brought you some butterbeer, really warms you up —”

“What did you do?” said Hermione, looking anxious. “Did you get any work done?”

“No,” said Harry. “Lupin made me a cup of tea in his office. And then Snape came in . . .”

He told them all about the goblet. Ron’s mouth fell open.

“*Lupin drank it?*” he gasped. “Is he mad?”

Hermione checked her watch.

“We’d better go down, you know, the feast’ll be starting in five minutes. . . .” They hurried through the portrait hole and into the crowd, still discussing Snape.

“But if he — you know” — Hermione dropped her voice, glancing nervously around — “if he *was* trying to — to poison Lupin — he wouldn’t have done it in front of Harry.”

“Yeah, maybe,” said Harry as they reached the entrance hall and crossed into the Great Hall. It had been decorated with hundreds and hundreds of candle-filled pumpkins, a cloud of fluttering live bats, and many flaming orange streamers, which were swimming lazily across the stormy ceiling like brilliant water snakes.

The food was delicious; even Hermione and Ron, who were full to bursting with Honeydukes sweets, managed second helpings of everything. Harry kept glancing at the staff table. Professor Lupin looked cheerful and as well as he ever did; he was talking animatedly to tiny little Professor Flitwick, the Charms teacher.

Harry moved his eyes along the table, to the place where Snape sat. Was he imagining it, or were Snape's eyes flickering toward Lupin more often than was natural?

The feast finished with an entertainment provided by the Hogwarts ghosts. They popped out of the walls and tables to do a bit of formation gliding. Nearly Headless Nick, the Gryffindor ghost, had a great success with a reenactment of his own botched beheading.

It had been such a pleasant evening that Harry's good mood couldn't even be spoiled by Malfoy, who shouted through the crowd as they all left the hall, "The dementors send their love, Potter!"

Harry, Ron, and Hermione followed the rest of the Gryffindors along the usual path to Gryffindor Tower, but when they reached the corridor that ended with the portrait of the Fat Lady, they found it jammed with students.

"Why isn't anyone going in?" said Ron curiously.

Harry peered over the heads in front of him. The portrait seemed to be closed.

"Let me through, please," came Percy's voice, and he came bustling importantly through the crowd. "What's the holdup here? You can't all have forgotten the password — excuse me, I'm Head Boy —"

And then a silence fell over the crowd, from the front first, so that a chill seemed to spread down the corridor. They heard Percy say, in a suddenly sharp voice, "Somebody get Professor Dumbledore. Quick."

People's heads turned; those at the back were standing on tiptoe.

"What's going on?" said Ginny, who had just arrived.

A moment later, Professor Dumbledore was there, sweeping toward the portrait; the Gryffindors squeezed together to let him through, and Harry, Ron, and Hermione moved closer to see what the trouble was.

“Oh, my —” Hermione grabbed Harry’s arm.

The Fat Lady had vanished from her portrait, which had been slashed so viciously that strips of canvas littered the floor; great chunks of it had been torn away completely.

Dumbledore took one quick look at the ruined painting and turned, his eyes somber, to see Professors McGonagall, Lupin, and Snape hurrying toward him.

“We need to find her,” said Dumbledore. “Professor McGonagall, please go to Mr. Filch at once and tell him to search every painting in the castle for the Fat Lady.”

“You’ll be lucky!” said a cackling voice.

It was Peeves the Poltergeist, bobbing over the crowd and looking delighted, as he always did, at the sight of wreckage or worry.

“What do you mean, Peeves?” said Dumbledore calmly, and Peeves’s grin faded a little. He didn’t dare taunt Dumbledore. Instead he adopted an oily voice that was no better than his cackle.

“Ashamed, Your Headship, sir. Doesn’t want to be seen. She’s a horrible mess. Saw her running through the landscape up on the fourth floor, sir, dodging between the trees. Crying something dreadful,” he said happily. “Poor thing,” he added unconvincingly.

“Did she say who did it?” said Dumbledore quietly.

“Oh yes, Professorhead,” said Peeves, with the air of one cradling a large bombshell in his arms. “He got very angry when she wouldn’t

let him in, you see.” Peeves flipped over and grinned at Dumbledore from between his own legs. “Nasty temper he’s got, that Sirius Black.”

Die Vet Vrou Vlug

Dit is nie lank nie of Verdediging teen die Donker Kunste is die meeste mens se gunstelingvak. Net Draco Malfoy en sy groepie Slibberins het iets slegs oor professor Lupin te sê.

“Kyk hoe lyk sy klere,” sal Malfoy in ’n luide fluisterstem sê as professor Lupin verbystap. “Hy trek soos ons ou huiself aan.”

Niemand anders gee egter om dat professor Lupin se kleed gelap en verslete is nie. Sy volgende paar klasse is net so interessant soos die eerste een. Na Boggarts bestudeer hulle Rooikappies, nare klein gnoomagtige kreatuur wat skuil oral waar daar bloed vergiet is, in die kerkers van kastele en in die kraters op verlate slagvelde, waar hulle wag om diegene wat verdwaal het met hul knuppels te moker. Van Rooikappies beweeg hulle na Kappas, grieselige waterdiertjies wat soos skubberige apies lyk, met gewebde hande wat jeuk om diegene wat onwetend deur hul poele waad te nekke om te draai.

Harry wens hy het net so baie van sommige van sy ander klasse gehou. Die ergste van almal is Towerdrankies. Snerp is deesdae in ’n besonder vernynige bui, en niemand het enige twyfel oor die rede nie. Die storie van die Boggart wat Snerp se vorm aangeneem het, en die manier hoe Neville hom in sy ouma se klere uitgedos het, het soos ’n veldbrand deur die skool versprei. Snerp dink duidelik nie dat dit snaaks is nie. Sy oë blits boosaardig elke keer dat professor Lupin se naam genoem word, en hy boelie vir Neville nog erger as tevore.

Harry sien ook al hoe meer op teen die ure wat hy in professor Trelawney se versmorende toringkamer moet deurbring, waar hy krom en skewe vorms en simbole moet ontleed, en sukkel om professor Trelawney se enorme oë vol trane elke keer dat sy na hom kyk, te ignoreer. Hy kan net nie van professor Trelawney hou nie, al word sy ook deur ’n groot deel van die klas met respek, amper eerbied, bejeën. Parvati Patel en Hildegard Braun is gedurig tydens die etensuur in professor Trelawney se toring, en kom altyd terug met irriterende meerderwaardige uitdrukkings op hul gesigte, nes of hulle dinge weet waarvan die ander onbewus is. Hulle het ook begin om in gedempte stemme met Harry te praat, asof hy op sy sterfbed lê.

Niemand hou regtig van Versorging van Magiese Kreature nie, want na die eerste aksie-belaaië periode ontsettend vervelig geword het. Dikwyl of Hagrid sy selfvertroue verloor het. Hulle leer lesuur na lesuur hoe om na Flobberwurms te kyk, seker die verveligste kreature wat bestaan.

“Hoekom sal enigiemand hoegenaamd na hulle wil kyk?” sê Ron, na hy vir nog ’n uur gekapte slaai-blare in die Flobberwurms se slymerige keelgate moes afdruk.

Aan die begin van Oktober kry Harry egter iets anders om hom mee besig te hou, iets wat so lekker is dat dit vergoed vir sy onbevredigende klas se. Die Kwiddiekseisoen is op hande, en Oliver Wood, kaptein van die Griffindorspan, roep een Donderdagaand ’n vergadering uit om hul taak-tiek vir die nuwe seisoen te bespreek.

Daar is sewe mense in ’n Kwiddiekspan: drie Jaers wat die doele moet maak deur die Swelger (’n rooi bal so groot soos ’n sokkerbal) deur een van die twintig meter hoë hoepels aan die kant van die veld te stuur; twee Brekers wat toegerus is met swaar kolwe waarmee hulle die Mokers moet wegslaan (twee swaar swart balle wat rondvlieg en die spelers aanval); ’n Wagter wat die doelpale verdedig, en die Soeker wat die moeilikste taak van almal het: om die Goue Snip te vang, ’n klein, gevleuelde bal so groot soos ’n okkerneut. Sodra die Snip gevang is, eindig die wedstryd en die Soeker se span kry ’n ekstra honderd-en-vyftig punte.

Oliver Wood is ’n stewiggeboude sewentienjarige in sy sewende en finale jaar by Hogwarts. Daar is ’n soort stille wanhoop in sy stem toe hy sy ses medespanlede toespreek, daar in die koue kleedkamers aan die kant van die Kwiddiekveld wat nou vinnig donker word:

“Dit is ons laaste kans – my laaste kans – om die Kwiddiekbeker te verower,” sê hy vir hulle terwyl hy op en af voor hulle loop. “Aan die einde van die jaar gaan ek weg. Ek sal nooit weer ’n kans hê nie.

“Griffindor het nou al vir sewe jaar nie gewen nie. Ek gee toe, die geluk was teen ons – beserings – en toe’s die toernooi laas jaar gekanselleer.” Wood sluk, asof die herinnering nog steeds ’n knop na sy keel bring. “Maar ons weet ook dat ons die *beste – verbrande – span – in – die – skool – het*,” sê hy en slaan met sy vuus in sy hand, die ou maniese glinstering terug in sy oë.

“Ons het drie wakker Jaers.”

Wood wys na Alicia Spinnet, Angelina Johnson en Katie Bell.

“Ons het twee *onbreekbare* Brekers.”

“Hou op, Oliver, jy maak ons skaam,” sê Fred en George Weasley tersame, terwyl hulle maak of hulle bloos.

“En ons het ’n Soeker wat ons *elke wedstryd laat wen!*” bulder Wood en gluur met ’n wilde soort trots na Harry. “En daar’s ek ook,” voeg hy as ’n nagedagte by.

"Ons dink jy's ook baie goed, Oliver," sê George.

"'n Knap Wagter," sê Fred.

"Die punt is," gaan Wood voort, terwyl hy weer eens op en af tree, "ons naam moes reeds vir die laaste twee jaar op die Kwiddiekbeker gestaan het. Vandat Harry in die span is, het ek gedink dat dit 'n uitgemaakte saak is. Maar ons het nie, en hierdie jaar is ons laaste kans om ons naam uiteindelik op die ding te sien."

Wood klink so terneergedruk dat selfs Fred en George simpatiek lyk.

"Oliver, vanjaar is die jaar," sê Fred.

"Ons sal dit regkry, Oliver!" sê Angelina.

"Beslis," sê Harry.

Dis met groot vasberadenheid dat die span met hul oefensessies begin, drie aande elke week. Die weer word kouer en natter, die nagte donkerder, maar nóg modder, wind of reën kan Harry se wonderlike visioen van hoe hulle uiteindelik die groot, silwer Kwiddiekbeker verower, laat verdof.

Toe Harry een aand na Kwiddiek na die Griffindor-geselskamer terugkeer, koud en styf maar in sy skik met hoe die oefening verloop het, is die hele vertrek opgewonde aan die gons.

"Wat gaan aan?" vra hy vir Ron en Hermien wat in twee van die beste stoele voor die vuur sit en aan hul kaarte vir Sterrekunde werk.

"Eerste Hogsmeade-naweek," sê Ron en wys na 'n kennisgewing wat op die gehawende ou kennisgewingbord verskyn het. "Einde van Oktober. Allerheiligeaand."

"Uitstekend," sê Fred wat vir Harry deur die portretopening gevolg het. "Ek moet by Zonko uitkom; ek het amper niks Stinkpille oor nie."

Harry gooi homself neer op die stoel langs Ron s'n en voel hoe die lewe uit hom vloei. Dit lyk of Hermien sy gedagtes lees.

"Harry, ek is seker jy sal volgende keer kan saamgaan," sê sy. "Hulle sal vir Swardt binnekort vang, hy's reeds een keer gesien."

"Swardt is nie dom genoeg om iets in Hogsmeade te probeer nie," sê Ron. "Vra vir McGonagall of jy hierdie keer kan gaan, Harry, ons gaan dalk eers weer oor 'n eeu –"

"Ron!" sê Hermien. "Harry is veronderstel om in die skool te bly –"

"Hy kan nie die enigste derdejaar wil wees om agter te bly nie," sê Ron. "Vra vir McGonagall, toe, Harry –"

"Ja, ek dink ek gaan," sê Harry en knik instemmend.

Hermien maak nog haar mond oop om te protesteer, maar op daardie oomblik spring Kromskeen ligvoets op haar skoot met 'n groot, dooie spinnekop tussen sy kake.

"Moët hy daardie ding voor ons eet?" sê Ron en trek 'n gesig.

"Baie mooi, Kromskeen, het jy dit heeltemal alleen gevang?" sê Hermien.

Kromskeen kou die spinnekop tydsaam, sy geel oë uitdagend op Ron gerig.

“Hou hom net daar by jou, dis al,” sê Ron ergerlik, en wend hom weer tot sy sterrekaart. “Skille slaap hier in my tas.”

Harry gaap. Hy wil eintlik bed toe gaan, maar hy moet sy eie sterrekaart nog klaarmaak. Hy trek sy tas nader, haal sy perkament, ink en veerpen uit en val weg.

“Jy kan myne afteken as jy wil,” sê Ron, terwyl hy sy laaste ster se naam swierig neerskryf, en daarna die kaart na Harry toe stoot.

Hermien, wat ’n afskrywery nie kan verdra nie, pers haar lippe saam, maar sê nie ’n woord nie. Kromskeen gluur nog steeds sonder om ’n oog te knip na Ron; net die punt van sy borselstert piets heen en weer. Toe, sonder enige waarskuwing, spring hy.

“JAAIKS!” brul Ron en gryp sy tas net toe Kromskeen sy vier stelle kloue diep daarin slaan en dit aan flarde begin skeur. “LAAT LOS, JOU DOM GEDROG!”

Ron sukkel om die tas uit Kromskeen se greep te bevry, maar Kromskeen klou spoegend en sissend.

“Ron, jy moenie hom seermaak nie!” protesteer Hermien. Die hele geselskamer kyk toe; Ron swaai die tas in die rondte, Kromskeen klou vir die vale, en Skille die rot vlieg bo uit –

“VANG DAARDIE KAT!” gil Ron toe Kromskeen die vertoingde tas laat los, oor die tafel spring en die verskrikte Skille agternasit.

George Weasley duik agter Kromskeen aan, maar dis mis; Skille glip deur twintig pare bene en skiet onder ’n ou laaikas in. Kromskeen gly tot stilstand, sak laag af op sy krom bene en begin om met sy voorpoot woes onder die laaikas te kap.

Ron en Hermien haas hulle soontoe; Hermien gryp Kromskeen om sy middellyf en sleep hom weg; Ron val plat op sy maag en trek vir Skille met groot moeite aan die stert onder die kas uit.

“Kyk hoe lyk hy!” sê hy briesend vir Hermien, terwyl hy Skille voor haar rondswaai. “Hy’s net vel en been! Jy moet daardie kat van hom af weghou!”

“Kromskeen verstaan nie dat dit verkeerd is nie!” sê Hermien en haar stem bewe. “Alle katte jaag rotte, Ron!”

“Daar’s iets baie vreemds aan daardie dier!” sê Ron, wat sukkel om die benoude, spartelende Skille in sy hemsak te druk. “Die ding het gehoor toe ek sê dat Skille in my tas is!”

“Watter absolute bog,” sê Hermien ongeduldig. “Kromskeen het hom geruik, Ron, hoe anders dink jy –”

“Daardie kat het ’n ding oor Skille!” sê Ron en ignoreer die mense om hom wat begin giggel. “En Skille was eerste hier, en hy is siek!”

Ron marsjeer deur die geselskamer en verdwyn met die trappe op na die seuns se slaapsaal.

Die volgende môre is Ron nog steeds kwaad vir Hermien. Tydens Herborgologie praat hy skaars met haar, selfs toe hy, Harry en Hermien saam aan dieselfde Pofferpeul moet werk.

"Hoe gaan dit met Skille?" vra Hermien versigtig terwyl hulle die vet pienk peule van die plante afstroop en die glansende bone in 'n houtemmer laat val.

"Hy kruip by my bed se voetenent weg, en hy bewe," sê Ron vererg, mis die emmer en mors bone oor die kweekhuis se vloer.

"Versigtig, Weasley, versigtig!" roep professor Spruit uit toe die bone voor hul oë opskiet en begin blom.

Hierna het hulle Transfigurasie. Harry, wat vasbeslote is om vir professor McGonagall na die les te gaan vra of hy saam met die ander na Hogsmeade kan gaan, gaan staan in die tou voor die klaskamer terwyl hy wonder hoe hy sy saak gaan stel. Sy aandag word egter afgelei deur 'n onderbreking voor in die ry.

Dit lyk of Hildegard Braun huil. Parvati se arm is om haar en sy verduidelik iets aan Septimus Floris en Dean Thomas wat baie ernstig lyk.

"Wat makeer, Hildegard?" sê Hermien bekommerd toe sy, Harry en Ron by die groepie aansluit.

"Sy het vanoggend 'n brief van die huis af gehad," fluister Parvati. "Dis haar konyn, Karnickel. 'n Jakkals het hom gevang."

"O," sê Hermien. "Ek is jammer, Hildegard."

"Ek moes geweet het!" sê Hildegard. "Weet jy watter dag dit is?"

"H'm –"

"Die sestiende Oktober! Daardie ding waarvoor jy bang is – dit sal op Vrydag die sestiende Oktober gebeur! Onthou jy? Sy was reg, sy was reg!"

Nou drom die hele klas om Hildegard saam. Septimus skud sy kop bekommerd. Hermien aarsel; toe sê sy, "Jy – was bang dat Karnickel deur 'n jakkals gevang gaan word?"

"Wel, nie noodwendig deur 'n jakkals nie," sê Hildegard terwyl sy deur haar trane na Hermien kyk, "maar ek was uit die aard van die saak bang dat hy sal doodgaan, of wat dink jy?"

"O," sê Hermien. Weer aarsel sy. Toe –

"Is Karnickel 'n ou konyn?"

"N-nee!" snik Hildegard. "H-hy's net 'n baba!"

Parvati druk vir Hildegard stywer vas.

"Hoekom was jy dan bang dat hy sal doodgaan?" vra Hermien.

Parvati gluur haar aan.

"Wel, dink logies daaroor," sê Hermien en draai na die res van die groep. "Ek bedoel, Karnickel is nie eens vandag dood nie, is hy? Hildegard het die nuus maar net vandag gekry –" Hildegard los 'n wilde kreet – en sy kon nie nog die hele tyd gedink het dat dit gaan gebeur nie, want dis 'n groot skok vir haar –"

“Moet jou nie aan Hermien steur nie, Hildegard,” sê Ron hard, “sy dink ander mense se troeteldiere tel nie.”

Op daardie oomblik maak professor McGonagall die klaskamer se deur oop, wat miskien 'n goeie ding is; Hermien en Ron gluur mekaar boosaardig aan, en toe hulle instap, gaan sit hulle aan weerskante van Harry en praat die hele lesuur glad nie met mekaar nie.

Toe die klok aan die einde van die klas lui, het Harry nog glad nie besluit wat hy vir professor McGonagall gaan sê nie, maar dit is sy wat eers- te oor Hogsmeade praat.

“Net 'n oomblik, asseblief!” roep sy uit toe die klas regmaak om uit te stap. “Siende dat julle almal in my huis is, die Hogsmeade-toestemmings- vorms moet voor Allerheiligeaand by my wees. Geen vorm, geen besoek aan die dorp nie, moet dus nie vergeet nie!”

Neville se hand skiet op.

“Asseblief, professor, ek – ek dink ek het myne verloor –”

“Jou ouma het joune direk aan my gestuur, Loggerenberg,” sê profes- sor McGonagall. “Sy het skynbaar gedink dat dit veiliger is. Wel, dit is al, julle mag gaan.”

“Vra haar nou,” brom Ron agter Harry.

“O, maar –” begin Hermien.

“Vra haar, Harry,” sê Ron koppig.

Harry wag tot die res van die klas uit is, toe stap hy senuagtig tot voor professor McGonagall se lessenaar.

“Ja, Potter?”

Harry haal diep asem.

“Professor, my oom en tante het – h'm – vergeet om my vorm te teken,” sê hy.

Professor McGonagall kyk oor haar vierkantige brilrame na hom, maar sê nie 'n woord nie.

“So – h'm – dink u dat ek dalk – ek bedoel – sal dit oukei wees as ek – as ek Hogsmeade toe gaan?”

Professor McGonagall kyk af en begin die papiere op haar lessenaar rondskuif.

“Ek is bevrees nie, Potter,” sê sy. “Jy het gehoor wat ek sê. Geen vorm, geen besoek aan die dorp nie. Dit is die reël.”

“Maar – professor, my oom en tante – u weet, hulle is Moggels, hulle verstaan nie regtig oor – oor Hogwarts-vorms en sulke dinge nie,” sê Har- ry, terwyl Ron hom kopknikkend aanmoedig. “As u sou sê dat ek kan gaan –”

“Maar ek sê nie so nie,” sê professor McGonagall terwyl sy opstaan en haar papiere netjies in haar laai pak. “Die vorm stel dit duidelik dat die ouer of voog verlof moet gee.” Sy draai om en kyk na hom met 'n vreem- de uitdrukking op haar gesig. Kan dit jammerte wees? “Dit spyt my,

Potter, maar dit is finaal. Jy moet nou gaan, anders is jy laat vir jou volgende klas."

Daar is geen salf aan te smeer nie. Ron noem professor McGonagall 'n hele string name wat Hermien baie kwaad maak; Hermien het 'n "dis-ook-maar-vir-die-beste"-uitdrukking op haar gesig wat Ron nog kwater maak, en Harry moet luister hoe almal in die klas hard en opgewonde praat oor wat hulle eerste gaan doen wanneer hulle in Hogsmeade kom.

"Daar is darem die fees," sê Ron in 'n poging om Harry op te beur. "Jy weet, die Allerheiligefees in die aand."

"Ja," sê Harry somber, "lekker."

Die Allerheiligefees is altyd baie lekker, maar die kos sal nog lekkerder smaak as hy die dag saam met al die ander in Hogsmeade kan wees. Niks wat enigiemand sê, kan hom beter laat voel oor hy moet agterbly nie. Dean Thomas, wat knap met 'n veerpen is, bied aan om oom Vernon se handtekening op die vorm te vervals, maar aangesien Harry reeds vir professor McGonagall gesê het dat dit nie geteken is nie, help dit net mooi niks. Ron stel die onsigbaarheidsmantel ietwat halfhartig voor, maar Hermien kelder die idee toe sy vir Ron daaraan herinner dat Dompeldorius gesê het dat die Dementors daardeur kan sien. Percy se kommentaar help die minste van almal.

"Almal maak 'n vreeslike ophef van Hogsmeade, maar ek verseker jou, Harry, dit is glad nie so wonderlik soos almal maak nie," sê hy ernstig. "Ek gee toe dat die lekkergoedwinkel nogal goed is, maar Zonko se Grapwinkel is werklik gevaarlik en, ja, die Kermende Krot is nogal die moeite werd om te besoek, maar regtig, Harry, behalwe daarvoor, mis jy absoluut niks."

Op Allerheiligeoggend word Harry saam met die res wakker. Toe hy afgaan vir onthyt voel hy uiters terneergedruk, maar hy doen sy bes om soos altyd op te tree.

"Ons sal vir jou hope lekkers van Honeydukes af bring," sê Hermien en sy lyk verskriklik jammer vir hom.

"Ja, tonne," sê Ron. In die lig van Harry se teleurstelling het hy en Hermien uiteindelik opgemaak van hul rusie oor Kromskeen.

"Moet julle nie oor my bekommer nie," sê Harry in 'n hopelik ongergde stem. "Ek sien julle by die fees. Geniet dit."

Hy stap saam met hulle tot by die ingangsportaal waar Fillis, die opsigter, net binne die voordeur staan, die name teen 'n lang lys kontroleer en agterdogtig in elke gesig kyk om seker te maak dat niemand wat moet agterbly, probeer uitglip nie.

"Bly jy agter, Potter?" skree Malfoy wat in die tou by Krabbe en Goliat staan. "Bang om verby die Dementors te stap?"

Harry ignoreer hom en loop alleen terug na die marmertrappe en deur die verlate gange tot in die Griffindortoring.

"Wagwoord?" sê die Vet Vrou toe sy vervaard wakker skrik.

"Fortuna Major," sê Harry lusteloos.

Die portret swaai oop en hy klim deur die luik tot in die geselskamer. Dit is vol geselsende eerste- en tweedejaars, sowel as 'n paar ouer studente wat duidelik al so dikwels by Hogsmeade was dat dit nie meer vir hulle snaaks is nie.

"Harry! Harry! Hallo, Harry!"

Dit is Colin Creevey, 'n tweedejaar wat Harry kwaai bewonder en nooit 'n kans om met hom te praat, laat verbygaan nie.

"Gaan jy nie Hogsmeade toe nie, Harry? Hoekom nie, Harry? Hoekom nie? Haai –" Colin kyk gretig om na sy vriende, "jy kan by ons kom sit as jy wil, Harry!"

"H'm – nee dankie, Colin," sê Harry, wat nie in die bui is vir 'n klomp mense wat begeesterd na die litteken op sy voorkop wil staar nie. "Ek – ek moet biblioteek toe gaan, het werk om te doen."

Hierna het hy nie 'n keuse as om in sy spore om te draai en weer deur die portretopening te klim nie.

"Hoekom het jy my verniet wakker gemaak?" roep die Vet Vrou iese-grimmig agterna toe hy wegstap.

Harry kies neerslagtig koers na die biblioteek, maar halfpad daarheen verander hy van plan; hy's nie lus vir werk nie. Hy draai om en loop hom vas in Fillis, wat duidelik so pas die laaste van die Hogsmeade-besoekers weggesien het.

"Wat maak jy?" snou Fillis hom agterdogtig toe.

"Niks," sê Harry eertlik.

"Niks!" spoeg Fillis en sy wange dril onplesierig. "Nou moet ek dit seker glo! Sluip hier op jou eentjie rond; hoekom is jy nie in Hogsmeade om Stinkpille en Kotspoeier en Warrelwurms te koop soos die res van jou nare klein maatjies nie?"

Harry lig 'n skouer.

"Toe, toe, gaan terug na jou geselskamer waar jy hoort!" sê Fillis bytend, en hy staan hom en agterna kyk tot Harry buite sig verdwyn.

Harry gaan egter nie terug na die geselskamer nie; hy klim 'n stel trappe en oorweeg dit so half om die Uilhuis te besoek en vir Hedwig te gaan kuier. Hy is net besig om met nog 'n gang langs te loop toe 'n stem vanuit een van die vertrekke sê, "Harry?"

Harry draai terug om te sien wie gepraat het en sien vir professor Lupin wat om sy kantoordeur kyk.

"Wat maak jy?" sê Lupin in 'n heel ander stem as Fillis s'n. "Waar is Ron en Hermien?"

"Hogsmeade," sê Harry gemaak-ongeërg.

“A,” sê Lupin. Vir ’n rukkie kyk hy na Harry. “Hoekom kom jy nie in nie? Ek het so pas ’n Grindeloog vir ons volgende les ontvang.”

“’n Wat?” sê Harry.

Hy volg Lupin tot in die kantoor. In die hoek staan ’n baie groot tenk vol water. In Sieklike groen kreatuur met skerp horinkies druk sy gesig plat teen die glas, trek skewebeek en maak sy lang, benerige vingers oop en toe.

“Waterduiwel,” sê Lupin en kyk ingedagte na die Grindeloog. “Ons behoort nie te veel probleme met hom te hê nie, nie na die Kappas nie. Die geheim is om sy greep te breek. Sien jy daardie besonder lang vingers? Sterk, maar ook niters broos.”

Die Grindeloog ontbloot sy groen tande en kruip dan weg onder ’n warboel seewier wat in ’n hoek lê.

“’n Koppie tee?” sê Lupin en soek na sy ketel. “Ek wou nou juis vir my iets maak.”

“Ja, dankie,” sê Harry ongemaklik.

Lupin tik met sy towerstaf teen die ketel en ’n wolk stoom warrel skielik by die tuit uit.

“Sit,” sê Lupin terwyl hy ’n stowwerige blik se deksel afhaal. “Ek is bevrees ek het net teesakkies – maar jy het seker al genoeg van teeblare gehad, of hoe?”

Harry gaap hom aan. Lupin se oë vonkel.

“Hoe weet u daarvan?” vra Harry.

“Professor McGonagall het my vertel,” sê Lupin en gee vir Harry ’n gekraakte beker vol tee aan. “Jy’s nie bekommerd nie, of hoe?”

“Nee,” sê Harry.

Vir ’n oomblik oorweeg hy dit om vir Lupin te sê van die hond wat hy in Magnoliasingel gesien het, maar dan besluit hy daarteen. Hy wil nie hê Lupin moet dink dat hy ’n lafaard is nie, veral nie na Lupin oënskynlik gedink het dat hy nie ’n Boggart sal kan hanteer nie.

Iets van wat Harry dink, moet op sy gesig wys, want Lupin sê, “Iets waaroor jy jou bekommer, Harry?”

“Nee,” jok Harry. Hy neem ’n slukkie tee en sien hoe die Grindeloog vir hom vuus maak. “Ja,” sê hy skielik en sit sy tee op Lupin se lessenaar neer. “U onthou daardie dag toe ons die Boggart gekry het?”

“Ja,” sê Lupin stadig.

“Hoekom wou u my nie daarteen laat veg nie?” sê Harry pront.

Lupin se wenkbroue lig.

“Ek sou reken dat dit vanselfsprekend was, Harry,” sê hy en hy klink verbaas.

Harry, wat verwag het dat Lupin gaan ontken dat hy enigiets van die aard gedoen het, is uit die veld geslaan.

“Hoekom?” vra hy weer.

“Wel,” sê Lupin en hy frons effens, “ek het aanvaar dat as die Boggart

jou sien, hy in die heer Woldemort sou verander."

Harry gaap hom aan. Dit is nie net die laaste antwoord wat hy verwag het nie, maar Lupin het Woldemort se naam gesê. Die enigste persoon wat Harry nog ooit die naam hardop hoor sê het (homself uitgesluit), is professor Dompeldorius.

"Ek was duidelik verkeerd," sê Lupin, nog steeds fronsend. "Maar ek het nie gedink dit sal 'n goeie idee wees om Woldemort in die personeelkamer te laat materialiseer nie. Ek het gereken die mense sal paniekbevange raak."

"Ek het eers aan Woldemort gedink," sê Harry eerlik, "maar toe onthou ek daardie – daardie Dementors."

"Ek sien," sê Lupin ingedagte. "Wel, wel . . . ek is beïndruk." Hy glimlag effens toe hy die verbaasde trek op Harry se gesig sien. "Dit wys dat dit vrees is waarvoor jy die bangste is. Baie verstandig, Harry."

Harry weet nie wat om hierop te sê nie, dus drink hy nog 'n bietjie tee. "Jy het dus gedink dat ek gereken het dat jy nie daartoe in staat is om teen die Boggart kragte te meet nie?" sê Lupin uitgeslape.

"Wel . . . ja," sê Harry. Hy voel meteens sommer baie beter. "Professor Lupin, u weet, daardie Dementors –"

Hy word onderbreek deur 'n klop aan die deur.

"Kom binne," roep Lupin.

Die deur gaan oop en Snerp kom in. Hy dra 'n wynglas wat effens rook, en toe hy vir Harry sien, steek hy vas en sy swart oë vernou.

"A, Severus," sê Lupin met 'n glimlag. "Baie dankie. Sal jy dit daar op die lessenaar vir my neersit?"

Snerp sit die rokende wynglas neer en sy oë dwaal van Harry na Lupin.

"Ek wys net gou my Grindeloog vir Harry," sê Lupin vriendelik en bedule na die tenk.

"Fassinierend," sê Snerp, sonder om eens daarna te kyk. "Jy moet dit onmiddellik drink, Lupin."

"Ja, ja, ek sal," sê Lupin.

"Ek het 'n hele hekseketel vol gemaak," gaan Snerp voort, "as jy nog nodig het."

"Ek sal seker môre nog drink. Baie dankie, Severus."

"Dis 'n plesier," sê Snerp, maar daar is 'n blik in sy oë waarvan Harry niks hou nie. Hy gaan sonder 'n glimlag uit die vertrek, en duidelik behoedsaam.

Harry bekyk die wynglas nuuskierig. Lupin glimlag.

"Professor Snerp het goedgunstiglik ingestem om 'n towerdrankie vir my te maak," sê hy. "Ek was nog nooit juis goed met die maak van towerdrankies nie en hierdie een is besonder ingewikkeld." Hy tel die wynglas op en ruik daaraan. "Net jammer dat suiker die effek teenwerk," voeg hy by toe hy 'n slukkie neem en sidder.

“Hoekom –?” begin Harry. Lupin kyk na hom en beantwoord die onvoltooide vraag.

“Ek is nie gesond nie,” sê hy. “Hierdie drankie is al wat help. Ek is baie gelukkig om saam met professor Snerp te werk; daar is min towenaars wat dit kan maak.”

Professor Lupin neem nog ’n sluk en Harry onderdruk ’n mal impuls om die wynglas uit sy hand te klap.

“Professor Snerp stel baie belang in die Donker Kunste,” blaker hy uit. “Regtig?” sê Lupin, maar hy lyk net ligweg geïnteresseerd en vat nog ’n sluk.

“Party mense reken –” Harry huiwer, dan gaan hy roekeloos voort, “party mense reken dat hy enigiets sal doen om die Verdediging teen die Donker Kunste-pos te kry.”

Lupin drink die wynglas leeg en trek ’n gesig.

“Walglik,” sê hy. “Wel, Harry, ek moet voortgaan met my werk. Ek sien jou later vanaand by die fees.”

“Goed,” sê Harry en sit sy leë beker neer. Die leë wynglas is nog steeds aan die rook.

“Hierso,” sê Ron. “Ons het soveel as wat ons kon dra, gebring.”

’n Stortreën van helderkleurige lekkergoed val in Harry se skoot. Dit is skemerdonker en Ron en Hermien het so pas in die geselskamer opgedaag. Hulle is pienk in die gesig van die koue wind en dit lyk asof hulle hulself gate uit geniet het.

“Dankie,” sê Harry en tel ’n pakkie klein swart Peperonnutte op. “Hoe lyk dit in Hogsmeade? Waar was julle oral?”

Dit klink of hulle oral was. Derwisj en Boems, die towertoerustingwinkel, Zonko se Grapwinkel, die Drie Besemstokke vir skuimende bekere warm Botterbier en nog talle ander plekke.

“Die poskantoor, Harry! Daar’s omtrent tweehonderd uile, almal op rakke en met kleurkode, dit hang net af hoe vinnig jy jou brief afgelewer wil hê!”

“Honeydukes het ’n nuwe soort fudge, hulle het gratis voorbeelde uitgedeel, hier’s ’n stukkie, kyk –”

“Ons *dink* ons het ’n monster gesien, regtig, daar is allerhande snaakse goed in die Drie Besemstokke –”

“Wens ons kon vir jou ’n slukkie Botterbier bring, dit maak ’n mens regtig lekker warm –”

“Wat het jy alles gedoen?” vra Hermien en sy lyk besorg. “Het jy enige werk klaargekry?”

“Nee,” sê Harry. “Lupin het vir my ’n beker tee in sy kantoor gemaak. En toe’t Snerp ingekom . . .”

Hy vertel vir hulle van die wynglas. Ron se mond val oop.

“Lupin het dit gedrink?” sê hy en snak na asem. “Is hy mal?”

Hermien kyk na haar horlosie.

“Ons moet gaan, weet julle, die fees begin oor vyf minute . . .” Hulle haas hulle deur die portretopening en sluit by die skare aan, terwyl hulle die hele tyd oor Snerp gesels.

“Maar as hy – jy weet –” Hermien se stem sak en sy kyk senuagtig om haar rond, “as hy wel vir Lupin wou – wou vergiftig – dan sal hy dit mos nie voor Harry doen nie?”

“Ja, miskien,” sê Harry toe hulle by die ingangsportaal kom en na die Groot Saal stap. Dit is versier met honderde en honderde pampoene met kerse in, ’n wolk fladderende, lewende vlermuise en talle vlammende oranje papierlinte wat soos helderkeurige waterslange kruis en dwars oor die stormagtige plafon swem.

Die kos is heerlik; selfs Hermien en Ron, wat tot barstens toe vol is van Honeydukes se lekkergoed, slaag daarin om tweede porsies van alles te eet. Harry loer gedurig na die personeeltafel. Professor Lupin lyk vrolik en net so gesond soos altyd; hy gesels lewendig met die kleine professor Flickerpitt, die onderwyser vir Towerspreuke. Harry se oë dwaal langs die tafel af na waar Snerp sit. Is dit sy verbeelding, of flikker Snerp se oë meer gereeld as wat natuurlik is in Lupin se rigting?

Die fees eindig met ’n opvoering aangebied deur die Hogwarts-spoke. Hulle glip uit die mure en tafels en doen formasiesweefwerk, Nick-amper-sonder-kop, die Griffindorspook, gee ’n baie suksesvolle voorstelling van sy onsuksesvolle onthoofding.

Dit is so ’n lekker aand dat Harry se goeie bui nie eens deur Malfoy bederf kan word nie, wat toe hulle uitstap deur die skare skree, “Die Dementors stuur liefdegroete, Potter!”

Harry, Ron en Hermien volg die res van die Griffindors langs die gewone pad na die Griffindortoring, maar toe hulle die gang bereik wat met die portret van die Vet Vrou eindig, is dit vol studente.

“Hoekom gaan niemand in nie?” sê Ron nuuskierig.

Harry loer oor die koppe voor hom. Dit lyk of die portret toe is.

“Laat my deur, asseblief,” kom Percy se stem en hy druk belangrik deur die mense. “Wat is die rede vir die oponthoud? Julle het darem seker nie almal die wagwoord vergeet nie – verskoon my, ek is die Hoofseun –”

Toe, van die voorste klomp mense af, val ’n stilte oor die hele skare sodat ’n vriesende koue deur die hele gang versprei. Hulle hoor hoe Percy in ’n skielike skerp stem sê, “Iemand gaan roep vir professor Dompeldorius. Gou.”

Mense se koppe draai; diegene wat agter is, staan op hul tone.

“Wat gaan aan?” vra Ginny wat so pas aangekom het.

Die volgende oomblik is professor Dompeldorius daar, en hy loop na

die portret; die Griffindors maak 'n pad om hom deur te laat, en Harry, Ron en Hermien beweeg nader om te probeer sien wat aangaan.

“O, nee –” roep Hermien uit en gryp Harry se arm.

Die Vet Vrou het uit die portret verdwyn en die prent is so erg gesny dat repe materiaal op die vloer lê; groot dele is heeltemal weggeskeur.

Dompeldorius gee een vlugtige blik na die verrinneweerde skildery en draai weg, sy oë somber, om te sien hoe professors McGonagall, Lupin en Snurp haastig nader kom.

“Ons moet haar kry,” sê Dompeldorius. “Professor McGonagall, gaan asseblief dadelik na mnr. Fillis en sê hy moet elke skildery in die kasteel vir die Vet Vrou deursoek.”

“Ek wil dit nog sien!” sê 'n kekkelende stem.

Dit is Nurks die poltergeist wat oor die skare sweef en hoogs in sy noppies lyk, soos altyd wanneer daar sorg en smarte in die rondte is.

“Wat bedoel jy, Nurks?” sê Dompeldorius bedaard, en Nurks se glimlag vervaag so ietwat. Hy durf dit nie waag om vir Dompeldorius te tempteer nie. Hy antwoord in 'n olierige stem wat amper erger as sy gekekkel is.

“Sy is skaam, u Hoofheid, meneer. Wil nie gesien wees nie. Lyk verskriklik. Het haar sien weghardloop oor die landskap op die vierde verdieping, meneer, koes-koes tussen die bome. Huil vreeslik,” sê hy opgetoë. “Arme ding,” voeg hy onoortuigend by.

“Het sy gesê wie dit gedoen het?” vra Dompeldorius kalm.

“O, ja, professorskop,” sê Nurks, en hy lyk soos een wat 'n yslike bom in sy arms vashou. “Hy't baie kwaad geword toe sy hom nie wou laat inkom nie, sien.” Nurks slaan bollemakiesie en grinnik vir Dompeldorius deur sy bene. “Lelike humeur, daardie Sirius Swardt.”

CHAPTER NINE



GRIM DEFEAT

Professor Dumbledore sent all the Gryffindors back to the Great Hall, where they were joined ten minutes later by the students from Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin, who all looked extremely confused.

“The teachers and I need to conduct a thorough search of the castle,” Professor Dumbledore told them as Professors McGonagall and Flitwick closed all doors into the hall. “I’m afraid that, for your own safety, you will have to spend the night here. I want the prefects to stand guard over the entrances to the hall and I am leaving the Head Boy and Girl in charge. Any disturbance should be reported to me immediately,” he added to Percy, who was looking immensely proud and important. “Send word with one of the ghosts.”

Professor Dumbledore paused, about to leave the hall, and said, "Oh, yes, you'll be needing . . ."

One casual wave of his wand and the long tables flew to the edges of the hall and stood themselves against the walls; another wave, and the floor was covered with hundreds of squashy purple sleeping bags.

"Sleep well," said Professor Dumbledore, closing the door behind him.

The hall immediately began to buzz excitedly, the Gryffindors were telling the rest of the school what had just happened.

"Everyone into their sleeping bags!" shouted Percy. "Come on, now, no more talking! Lights out in ten minutes!"

"C'mon," Ron said to Harry and Hermione; they seized three sleeping bags and dragged them into a corner.

"Do you think Black's still in the castle?" Hermione whispered anxiously.

"Dumbledore obviously thinks he might be," said Ron.

"It's very lucky he picked tonight, you know," said Hermione as they climbed fully dressed into their sleeping bags and propped themselves on their elbows to talk. "The one night we weren't in the tower. . . ."

"I reckon he's lost track of time, being on the run," said Ron. "Didn't realize it was Halloween. Otherwise he'd have come bursting in here."

Hermione shuddered.

All around them, people were asking one another the same question: "*How did he get in?*"

“Maybe he knows how to Apparate,” said a Ravenclaw a few feet away. “Just appear out of thin air, you know.”

“Disguised himself, probably,” said a Hufflepuff fifth year.

“He could’ve flown in,” suggested Dean Thomas.

“Honestly, am I the *only* person who’s ever bothered to read *Hogwarts: A History*?” said Hermione crossly to Harry and Ron.

“Probably,” said Ron. “Why?”

“Because the castle’s protected by more than *walls*, you know,” said Hermione. “There are all sorts of enchantments on it, to stop people entering by stealth. You can’t just Apparate in here. And I’d like to see the disguise that could fool those dementors. They’re guarding every single entrance to the grounds. They’d have seen him fly in too. And Filch knows all the secret passages, they’ll have them covered. . . .”

“The lights are going out now!” Percy shouted. “I want everyone in their sleeping bags and no more talking!”

The candles all went out at once. The only light now came from the silvery ghosts, who were drifting about talking seriously to the prefects, and the enchanted ceiling, which, like the sky outside, was scattered with stars. What with that, and the whispering that still filled the hall, Harry felt as though he were sleeping outdoors in a light wind.

Once every hour, a teacher would reappear in the hall to check that everything was quiet. Around three in the morning, when many students had finally fallen asleep, Professor Dumbledore came in. Harry watched him looking around for Percy, who had been prowling between the sleeping bags, telling people off for talking. Percy was

only a short way away from Harry, Ron, and Hermione, who quickly pretended to be asleep as Dumbledore's footsteps drew nearer.

"Any sign of him, Professor?" asked Percy in a whisper.

"No. All well here?"

"Everything under control, sir."

"Good. There's no point moving them all now. I've found a temporary guardian for the Gryffindor portrait hole. You'll be able to move them back in tomorrow."

"And the Fat Lady, sir?"

"Hiding in a map of Argyllshire on the second floor. Apparently she refused to let Black in without the password, so he attacked. She's still very distressed, but once she's calmed down, I'll have Mr. Filch restore her."

Harry heard the door of the hall creak open again, and more footsteps.

"Headmaster?" It was Snape. Harry kept quite still, listening hard. "The whole of the third floor has been searched. He's not there. And Filch has done the dungeons; nothing there either."

"What about the Astronomy Tower? Professor Trelawney's room? The Owlery?"

"All searched . . ."

"Very well, Severus. I didn't really expect Black to linger."

"Have you any theory as to how he got in, Professor?" asked Snape.

Harry raised his head very slightly off his arms to free his other ear.

“Many, Severus, each of them as unlikely as the next.”

Harry opened his eyes a fraction and squinted up to where they stood; Dumbledore’s back was to him, but he could see Percy’s face, rapt with attention, and Snape’s profile, which looked angry.

“You remember the conversation we had, Headmaster, just before — ah — the start of term?” said Snape, who was barely opening his lips, as though trying to block Percy out of the conversation.

“I do, Severus,” said Dumbledore, and there was something like warning in his voice.

“It seems — almost impossible — that Black could have entered the school without inside help. I did express my concerns when you appointed —”

“I do not believe a single person inside this castle would have helped Black enter it,” said Dumbledore, and his tone made it so clear that the subject was closed that Snape didn’t reply. “I must go down to the dementors,” said Dumbledore. “I said I would inform them when our search was complete.”

“Didn’t they want to help, sir?” said Percy.

“Oh yes,” said Dumbledore coldly. “But I’m afraid no dementor will cross the threshold of this castle while I am headmaster.”

Percy looked slightly abashed. Dumbledore left the hall, walking quickly and quietly. Snape stood for a moment, watching the headmaster with an expression of deep resentment on his face; then he too left.

Harry glanced sideways at Ron and Hermione. Both of them had their eyes open too, reflecting the starry ceiling.

“What was all that about?” Ron mouthed.

The school talked of nothing but Sirius Black for the next few days. The theories about how he had entered the castle became wilder and wilder; Hannah Abbott, from Hufflepuff, spent much of their next Herbology class telling anyone who'd listen that Black could turn into a flowering shrub.

The Fat Lady's ripped canvas had been taken off the wall and replaced with the portrait of Sir Cadogan and his fat gray pony. Nobody was very happy about this. Sir Cadogan spent half his time challenging people to duels, and the rest thinking up ridiculously complicated passwords, which he changed at least twice a day.

"He's a complete lunatic," said Seamus Finnigan angrily to Percy. "Can't we get anyone else?"

"None of the other pictures wanted the job," said Percy. "Frightened of what happened to the Fat Lady. Sir Cadogan was the only one brave enough to volunteer."

Sir Cadogan, however, was the least of Harry's worries. He was now being closely watched. Teachers found excuses to walk along corridors with him, and Percy Weasley (acting, Harry suspected, on his mother's orders) was tailing him everywhere like an extremely pompous guard dog. To cap it all, Professor McGonagall summoned Harry into her office, with such a somber expression on her face Harry thought someone must have died.

"There's no point hiding it from you any longer, Potter," she said in a very serious voice. "I know this will come as a shock to you, but Sirius Black —"

"I know he's after me," said Harry wearily. "I heard Ron's dad telling his mum. Mr. Weasley works for the Ministry of Magic."

Professor McGonagall seemed very taken aback. She stared at Harry for a moment or two, then said, "I see! Well, in that case, Potter, you'll understand why I don't think it's a good idea for you to be practicing Quidditch in the evenings. Out on the field with only your team members, it's very exposed, Potter —"

"We've got our first match on Saturday!" said Harry, outraged. "I've got to train, Professor!"

Professor McGonagall considered him intently. Harry knew she was deeply interested in the Gryffindor team's prospects; it had been she, after all, who'd suggested him as Seeker in the first place. He waited, holding his breath.

"Hmm . . ." Professor McGonagall stood up and stared out of the window at the Quidditch field, just visible through the rain. "Well, goodness knows, I'd like to see us win the Cup at last . . . but all the same, Potter . . . I'd be happier if a teacher were present. I'll ask Madam Hooch to oversee your training sessions."

The weather worsened steadily as the first Quidditch match drew nearer. Undaunted, the Gryffindor team was training harder than ever under the eye of Madam Hooch. Then, at their final training session before Saturday's match, Oliver Wood gave his team some unwelcome news.

"We're not playing Slytherin!" he told them, looking very angry. "Flint's just been to see me. We're playing Hufflepuff instead."

"Why?" chorused the rest of the team.

"Flint's excuse is that their Seeker's arm's still injured," said Wood, grinding his teeth furiously. "But it's obvious why they're

doing it. Don't want to play in this weather. Think it'll damage their chances. . . .”

There had been strong winds and heavy rain all day, and as Wood spoke, they heard a distant rumble of thunder.

“There's *nothing* wrong with Malfoy's arm!” said Harry furiously. “He's faking it!”

“I know that, but we can't prove it,” said Wood bitterly. “And we've been practicing all those moves assuming we're playing Slytherin, and instead it's Hufflepuff, and their style's quite different. They've got a new Captain and Seeker, Cedric Diggory —”

Angelina, Alicia, and Katie suddenly giggled.

“What?” said Wood, frowning at this lighthearted behavior.

“He's that tall, good-looking one, isn't he?” said Angelina.

“Strong and silent,” said Katie, and they started to giggle again.

“He's only silent because he's too thick to string two words together,” said Fred impatiently. “I don't know why you're worried, Oliver, Hufflepuff is a pushover. Last time we played them, Harry caught the Snitch in about five minutes, remember?”

“We were playing in completely different conditions!” Wood shouted, his eyes bulging slightly. “Diggory's put a very strong side together! He's an excellent Seeker! I was afraid you'd take it like this! We mustn't relax! We must keep our focus! Slytherin is trying to wrong-foot us! We *must* win!”

“Oliver, calm down!” said Fred, looking slightly alarmed. “We're taking Hufflepuff very seriously. *Seriously*.”

The day before the match, the winds reached howling point and the

rain fell harder than ever. It was so dark inside the corridors and classrooms that extra torches and lanterns were lit. The Slytherin team was looking very smug indeed, and none more so than Malfoy.

“Ah, if only my arm was feeling a bit better!” he sighed as the gale outside pounded the windows.

Harry had no room in his head to worry about anything except the match tomorrow. Oliver Wood kept hurrying up to him between classes and giving him tips. The third time this happened, Wood talked for so long that Harry suddenly realized he was ten minutes late for Defense Against the Dark Arts, and set off at a run with Wood shouting after him, “Diggory’s got a very fast swerve, Harry, so you might want to try looping him —”

Harry skidded to a halt outside the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom, pulled the door open, and dashed inside.

“Sorry I’m late, Professor Lupin, I —”

But it wasn’t Professor Lupin who looked up at him from the teacher’s desk, it was Snape.

“This lesson began ten minutes ago, Potter, so I think we’ll make it ten points from Gryffindor. Sit down.”

But Harry didn’t move.

“Where’s Professor Lupin?” he said.

“He says he is feeling too ill to teach today,” said Snape with a twisted smile. “I believe I told you to sit down?”

But Harry stayed where he was.

“What’s wrong with him?”

Snape’s black eyes glittered.

“Nothing life-threatening,” he said, looking as though he wished it

were. “Five more points from Gryffindor, and if I have to ask you to sit down again, it will be fifty.”

Harry walked slowly to his seat and sat down. Snape looked around at the class.

“As I was saying before Potter interrupted, Professor Lupin has not left any record of the topics you have covered so far —”

“Please, sir, we’ve done boggarts, Red Caps, kappas, and grindylows,” said Hermione quickly, “and we’re just about to start —”

“Be quiet,” said Snape coldly. “I did not ask for information. I was merely commenting on Professor Lupin’s lack of organization.”

“He’s the best Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher we’ve ever had,” said Dean Thomas boldly, and there was a murmur of agreement from the rest of the class. Snape looked more menacing than ever.

“You are easily satisfied. Lupin is hardly overtaxing you — I would expect first years to be able to deal with Red Caps and grindylows. Today we shall discuss —”

Harry watched him flick through the textbook, to the very back chapter, which he must know they hadn’t covered.

“— werewolves,” said Snape.

“But, sir,” said Hermione, seemingly unable to restrain herself, “we’re not supposed to do werewolves yet, we’re due to start hinkypunks —”

“Miss Granger,” said Snape in a voice of deadly calm, “I was under the impression that I am teaching this lesson, not you. And I am telling you all to turn to page 394.” He glanced around again. “*All* of

you! *Now!*”

With many bitter sidelong looks and some sullen muttering, the class opened their books.

“Which of you can tell me how we distinguish between the werewolf and the true wolf?” said Snape.

Everyone sat in motionless silence; everyone except Hermione, whose hand, as it so often did, had shot straight into the air.

“Anyone?” Snape said, ignoring Hermione. His twisted smile was back. “Are you telling me that Professor Lupin hasn’t even taught you the basic distinction between —”

“We told you,” said Parvati suddenly, “we haven’t got as far as werewolves yet, we’re still on —”

“*Silence!*” snarled Snape. “Well, well, well, I never thought I’d meet a third-year class who wouldn’t even recognize a werewolf when they saw one. I shall make a point of informing Professor Dumbledore how very behind you all are . . .”

“Please, sir,” said Hermione, whose hand was still in the air, “the werewolf differs from the true wolf in several small ways. The snout of the werewolf —”

“That is the second time you have spoken out of turn, Miss Granger,” said Snape coolly. “Five more points from Gryffindor for being an insufferable know-it-all.”

Hermione went very red, put down her hand, and stared at the floor with her eyes full of tears. It was a mark of how much the class loathed Snape that they were all glaring at him, because every one of them had called Hermione a know-it-all at least once, and Ron, who told Hermione she was a know-it-all at least twice a week, said

loudly, “You asked us a question and she knows the answer! Why ask if you don’t want to be told?”

The class knew instantly he’d gone too far. Snape advanced on Ron slowly, and the room held its breath.

“Detention, Weasley,” Snape said silkily, his face very close to Ron’s. “And if I ever hear you criticize the way I teach a class again, you will be very sorry indeed.”

No one made a sound throughout the rest of the lesson. They sat and made notes on werewolves from the textbook, while Snape prowled up and down the rows of desks, examining the work they had been doing with Professor Lupin.

“Very poorly explained . . . That is incorrect, the kappa is more commonly found in Mongolia. . . . Professor Lupin gave this eight out of ten? I wouldn’t have given it three. . . .”

When the bell rang at last, Snape held them back.

“You will each write an essay, to be handed in to me, on the ways you recognize and kill werewolves. I want two rolls of parchment on the subject, and I want them by Monday morning. It is time somebody took this class in hand. Weasley, stay behind, we need to arrange your detention.”

Harry and Hermione left the room with the rest of the class, who waited until they were well out of earshot, then burst into a furious tirade about Snape.

“Snape’s never been like this with any of our other Defense Against the Dark Arts teachers, even if he did want the job,” Harry said to Hermione. “Why’s he got it in for Lupin? D’you think this is all because of the boggart?”

"I don't know," said Hermione pensively. "But I really hope Professor Lupin gets better soon. . . ."

Ron caught up with them five minutes later, in a towering rage.

"D'you know what that" — (he called Snape something that made Hermione say "*Ron!*") — "is making me do? I've got to scrub out the bedpans in the hospital wing. *Without magic!*" He was breathing deeply, his fists clenched. "Why couldn't Black have hidden in Snape's office, eh? He could have finished him off for us!"

Harry woke extremely early the next morning, so early that it was still dark. For a moment he thought the roaring of the wind had woken him. Then he felt a cold breeze on the back of his neck and sat bolt upright — Peeves the Poltergeist had been floating next to him, blowing hard in his ear.

"What did you do that for?" said Harry furiously.

Peeves puffed out his cheeks, blew hard, and zoomed backward out of the room, cackling.

Harry fumbled for his alarm clock and looked at it. It was half past four. Cursing Peeves, he rolled over and tried to get back to sleep, but it was very difficult, now that he was awake, to ignore the sounds of the thunder rumbling overhead, the pounding of the wind against the castle walls, and the distant creaking of the trees in the Forbidden Forest. In a few hours he would be out on the Quidditch field, battling through that gale. Finally, he gave up any thought of more sleep, got up, dressed, picked up his Nimbus Two Thousand, and walked quietly out of the dormitory.

As Harry opened the door, something brushed against his leg. He

bent down just in time to grab Crookshanks by the end of his bushy tail and drag him outside.

“You know, I reckon Ron was right about you,” Harry told Crookshanks suspiciously. “There are plenty of mice around this place — go and chase them. Go on,” he added, nudging Crookshanks down the spiral staircase with his foot. “Leave Scabbers alone.”

The noise of the storm was even louder in the common room. Harry knew better than to think the match would be canceled; Quidditch matches weren’t called off for trifles like thunderstorms. Nevertheless, he was starting to feel very apprehensive. Wood had pointed out Cedric Diggory to him in the corridor; Diggory was a fifth year and a lot bigger than Harry. Seekers were usually light and speedy, but Diggory’s weight would be an advantage in this weather because he was less likely to be blown off course.

Harry whiled away the hours until dawn in front of the fire, getting up every now and then to stop Crookshanks from sneaking up the boys’ staircase again. At long last Harry thought it must be time for breakfast, so he headed through the portrait hole alone.

“Stand and fight, you mangy cur!” yelled Sir Cadogan.

“Oh, shut up,” Harry yawned.

He revived a bit over a large bowl of porridge, and by the time he’d started on toast, the rest of the team had turned up.

“It’s going to be a tough one,” said Wood, who wasn’t eating anything.

“Stop worrying, Oliver,” said Alicia soothingly, “we don’t mind a bit of rain.”

But it was considerably more than a bit of rain. Such was the

popularity of Quidditch that the whole school turned out to watch the match as usual, but they ran down the lawns toward the Quidditch field, heads bowed against the ferocious wind, umbrellas being whipped out of their hands as they went. Just before he entered the locker room, Harry saw Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle, laughing and pointing at him from under an enormous umbrella on their way to the stadium.

The team changed into their scarlet robes and waited for Wood's usual pre-match pep talk, but it didn't come. He tried to speak several times, made an odd gulping noise, then shook his head hopelessly and beckoned them to follow him.

The wind was so strong that they staggered sideways as they walked out onto the field. If the crowd was cheering, they couldn't hear it over the fresh rolls of thunder. Rain was splattering over Harry's glasses. How on earth was he going to see the Snitch in this?

The Hufflepuffs were approaching from the opposite side of the field, wearing canary-yellow robes. The Captains walked up to each other and shook hands; Diggory smiled at Wood but Wood now looked as though he had lockjaw and merely nodded. Harry saw Madam Hooch's mouth form the words, "Mount your brooms." He pulled his right foot out of the mud with a squelch and swung it over his Nimbus Two Thousand. Madam Hooch put her whistle to her lips and gave it a blast that sounded shrill and distant — they were off.

Harry rose fast, but his Nimbus was swerving slightly with the wind. He held it as steady as he could and turned, squinting into the rain.

Within five minutes Harry was soaked to his skin and frozen,

hardly able to see his teammates, let alone the tiny Snitch. He flew backward and forward across the field past blurred red and yellow shapes, with no idea of what was happening in the rest of the game. He couldn't hear the commentary over the wind. The crowd was hidden beneath a sea of cloaks and battered umbrellas. Twice Harry came very close to being unseated by a Bludger; his vision was so clouded by the rain on his glasses he hadn't seen them coming.

He lost track of time. It was getting harder and harder to hold his broom straight. The sky was getting darker, as though night had decided to come early. Twice Harry nearly hit another player, without knowing whether it was a teammate or opponent; everyone was now so wet, and the rain so thick, he could hardly tell them apart.

With the first flash of lightning came the sound of Madam Hooch's whistle; Harry could just see the outline of Wood through the thick rain, gesturing him to the ground. The whole team splashed down into the mud.

"I called for time-out!" Wood roared at his team. "Come on, under here —"

They huddled at the edge of the field under a large umbrella; Harry took off his glasses and wiped them hurriedly on his robes.

"What's the score?"

"We're fifty points up," said Wood, "but unless we get the Snitch soon, we'll be playing into the night."

"I've got no chance with these on," Harry said exasperatedly, waving his glasses.

At that very moment, Hermione appeared at his shoulder; she was

holding her cloak over her head and was, inexplicably, beaming.

“I’ve had an idea, Harry! Give me your glasses, quick!”

He handed them to her, and as the team watched in amazement, Hermione tapped them with her wand and said, “*Impervius!*”

“There!” she said, handing them back to Harry. “They’ll repel water!”

Wood looked as though he could have kissed her.

“Brilliant!” he called hoarsely after her as she disappeared into the crowd. “Okay, team, let’s go for it!”

Hermione’s spell had done the trick. Harry was still numb with cold, still wetter than he’d ever been in his life, but he could see. Full of fresh determination, he urged his broom through the turbulent air, staring in every direction for the Snitch, avoiding a Bludger, ducking beneath Diggory, who was streaking in the opposite direction.

There was another clap of thunder, followed immediately by forked lightning. This was getting more and more dangerous. Harry needed to get the Snitch quickly —

He turned, intending to head back toward the middle of the field, but at that moment, another flash of lightning illuminated the stands, and Harry saw something that distracted him completely — the silhouette of an enormous shaggy black dog, clearly imprinted against the sky, motionless in the topmost, empty row of seats.

Harry’s numb hands slipped on the broom handle and his Nimbus dropped a few feet. Shaking his sodden bangs out of his eyes, he squinted back into the stands. The dog had vanished.

“Harry!” came Wood’s anguished yell from the Gryffindor

goalposts. "Harry, behind you!"

Harry looked wildly around. Cedric Diggory was pelting up the field, and a tiny speck of gold was shimmering in the rain-filled air between them —

With a jolt of panic, Harry threw himself flat to the broom-handle and zoomed toward the Snitch.

"Come on!" he growled at his Nimbus as the rain whipped his face. "*Faster!*"

But something odd was happening. An eerie silence was falling across the stadium. The wind, though as strong as ever, was forgetting to roar. It was as though someone had turned off the sound, as though Harry had gone suddenly deaf — what was going on?

And then a horribly familiar wave of cold swept over him, inside him, just as he became aware of something moving on the field below. . . .

Before he'd had time to think, Harry had taken his eyes off the Snitch and looked down.

At least a hundred dementors, their hidden faces pointing up at him, were standing beneath him. It was as though freezing water were rising in his chest, cutting at his insides. And then he heard it again. . . . Someone was screaming, screaming inside his head. . . . a woman . . .

"Not Harry, not Harry, please not Harry!"

"Stand aside, you silly girl . . . stand aside, now. . . ."

"Not Harry, please no, take me, kill me instead —"

Numbing, swirling white mist was filling Harry's brain. . . . What was he doing? Why was he flying? He needed to help her. . . . She

was going to die. . . . She was going to be murdered. . . .

He was falling, falling through the icy mist.

“Not Harry! Please . . . have mercy . . . have mercy. . . .”

A shrill voice was laughing, the woman was screaming, and Harry knew no more.

“Lucky the ground was so soft.”

“I thought he was dead for sure.”

“But he didn’t even break his glasses.”

Harry could hear the voices whispering, but they made no sense whatsoever. He didn’t have a clue where he was, or how he’d got there, or what he’d been doing before he got there. All he knew was that every inch of him was aching as though it had been beaten.

“That was the scariest thing I’ve ever seen in my life.”

Scariest . . . the scariest thing . . . hooded black figures
cold . . . screaming . . .

Harry’s eyes snapped open. He was lying in the hospital wing. The Gryffindor Quidditch team, spattered with mud from head to foot, was gathered around his bed. Ron and Hermione were also there, looking as though they’d just climbed out of a swimming pool.

“Harry!” said Fred, who looked extremely white underneath the mud. “How’re you feeling?”

It was as though Harry’s memory was on fast forward. The lightning — the Grim — the Snitch — and the dementors . . .

“What happened?” he said, sitting up so suddenly they all gasped.

“You fell off,” said Fred. “Must’ve been — what — fifty feet?”

“We thought you’d died,” said Alicia, who was shaking.

Hermione made a small, squeaky noise. Her eyes were extremely bloodshot.

“But the match,” said Harry. “What happened? Are we doing a replay?”

No one said anything. The horrible truth sank into Harry like a stone.

“We didn’t — *lose*?”

“Diggory got the Snitch,” said George. “Just after you fell. He didn’t realize what had happened. When he looked back and saw you on the ground, he tried to call it off. Wanted a rematch. But they won fair and square . . . even Wood admits it.”

“Where is Wood?” said Harry, suddenly realizing he wasn’t there.

“Still in the showers,” said Fred. “We think he’s trying to drown himself.”

Harry put his face to his knees, his hands gripping his hair. Fred grabbed his shoulder and shook it roughly.

“C’mon, Harry, you’ve never missed the Snitch before.”

“There had to be one time you didn’t get it,” said George.

“It’s not over yet,” said Fred. “We lost by a hundred points, right? So if Hufflepuff loses to Ravenclaw and we beat Ravenclaw and Slytherin . . .”

“Hufflepuff’ll have to lose by at least two hundred points,” said George.

“But if they beat Ravenclaw . . .”

“No way, Ravenclaw is too good. But if Slytherin loses against Hufflepuff . . .”

“It all depends on the points — a margin of a hundred either way —”

Harry lay there, not saying a word. They had lost . . . for the first time ever, he had lost a Quidditch match.

After ten minutes or so, Madam Pomfrey came over to tell the team to leave him in peace.

“We’ll come and see you later,” Fred told him. “Don’t beat yourself up, Harry, you’re still the best Seeker we’ve ever had.”

The team trooped out, trailing mud behind them. Madam Pomfrey shut the door behind them, looking disapproving. Ron and Hermione moved nearer to Harry’s bed.

“Dumbledore was really angry,” Hermione said in a quaking voice. “I’ve never seen him like that before. He ran onto the field as you fell, waved his wand, and you sort of slowed down before you hit the ground. Then he whirled his wand at the dementors. Shot silver stuff at them. They left the stadium right away. . . . He was furious they’d come onto the grounds. We heard him —”

“Then he magicked you onto a stretcher,” said Ron. “And walked up to school with you floating on it. Everyone thought you were . . .”

His voice faded, but Harry hardly noticed. He was thinking about what the dementors had done to him . . . about the screaming voice. He looked up and saw Ron and Hermione looking at him so anxiously that he quickly cast around for something matter-of-fact to say.

“Did someone get my Nimbus?”

Ron and Hermione looked quickly at each other.

“Er —”

“What?” said Harry, looking from one to the other.

“Well . . . when you fell off, it got blown away,” said Hermione hesitantly.

“And?”

“And it hit — it hit — oh, Harry — it hit the Whomping Willow.”

Harry’s insides lurched. The Whomping Willow was a very violent tree that stood alone in the middle of the grounds.

“And?” he said, dreading the answer.

“Well, you know the Whomping Willow,” said Ron. “It — it doesn’t like being hit.”

“Professor Flitwick brought it back just before you came around,” said Hermione in a very small voice.

Slowly, she reached down for a bag at her feet, turned it upside down, and tipped a dozen bits of splintered wood and twig onto the bed, the only remains of Harry’s faithful, finally beaten broomstick.

'n Grimmige Nederlaag

Professor Dompeldorius stuur al die Griffindors terug na die Groot Saal waar die studente van Hoesenproes, Raweklou en Slibberin, wat almal baie verward lyk, tien minute later by hulle aansluit.

"Ek en die onderwysers moet die kasteel behoorlik deursoek," sê Dompeldorius vir hulle nadat professors McGonagall en Flickerpitt al die Saal se deure toegemaak het. "Ek is bevrees dat julle, vir jul eie veiligheid, vannag hier sal moet slaap. Ek wil hê dat die Prefekte moet wag staan voor die ingange na die Saal en ek laat die Hoofseun en Hoofdogter in bevel. Enige stoornis moet onmiddellik aangemeld word," sê hy vir Percy wat baie trots en belangrik lyk. "Stuur een van die spoke."

Professor Dompeldorius is op die punt om die Saal te verlaat toe hy aarsel en sê, "O, ja, julle het die volgende nodig . . ."

Met een ongeërgde beweging van sy towerstaf vlieg die lang tafels na die kante van die Saal en gaan staan teen die mure; nog 'n beweging en die vloer lê vol van honderde knus, pers slaapsakke.

"Lekker slaap," sê professor Dompeldorius en maak die deur agter hom toe.

Die Saal begin dadelik opgewonde gons; die Griffindors vertel die res van die skool wat so pas gebeur het.

"Almal in hul slaapsakke!" skree Percy. "Toe, toe, niks meer gepraterie nie! Oor tien minute is die ligte uit!"

"Komaan," sê Ron vir Harry en Hermien; hulle gryp drie slaapsakke en sleep hulle na 'n hoek.

"Dink julle Swardt is nog steeds in die kasteel?" fluister Hermien angstig.

"Dit lyk of Dompeldorius so dink," sê Ron.

"Dis 'n geluk dat hy vannag gekies het, weet julle," sê Hermien toe hulle ten volle geklee in hul slaapsakke kruip en hulself op hul elmboë steun om te kan gesels. "Die een nag dat ons nie in die toring is nie . . ."

"Ek sou sê hy't tred met die tyd verloor met dié dat hy aan die weghol is," sê Ron. "Het seker nie besef dat dit Allerheiligeaand is nie. Anders sou hy hier ingebars het."

Hermien sidder.

Oral om hulle vra mense mekaar dieselfde vraag: "Hoe het hy ingekom?"

"Miskien weet hy hoe om te Appareer," sê 'n Raweklou 'n paar tree verder. "Net so uit niks verskyn, weet jy."

"Homself waarskynlik vermom," sê 'n vyfdejaar Hoesenproeser.

"Hy't dalk ingevlieg," stel Dean Thomas voor.

"Regtig, is ek nou die enigste mens wat al die moeite gedoen het om *Die Geskiedenis van Hogwarts* te lees?" sê Hermien ergerlik aan Harry en Ron.

"Heel waarskynlik," sê Ron. "Hoekom?"

"Omdat die kasteel deur meer as net blote mure beskerm word, weet julle," sê Hermien. "Daar is allerhande towerspreuke wat mense keer wat inkom. Jy kan nie net hierheen Appareer nie. En ek wil nog die vermomming sien wat daardie Dementors gaan fop. Hulle bewaak elke enkele ingang na die terrein. Hulle sou hom sien invlieg het ook. En Fil-lis ken al die geheime tunnels, hulle sal dit ook bewaak . . ."

"Die ligte gaan nou uit!" roep Percy. "Almal in hul slaapsakke en niks meer gepraterij nie!"

Die kerse gaan almal gelyk uit. Nou kom die enigste lig van die silweragtige spoke wat ronddryf en ernstig met die Prefekte gesels, en van die betowerde plafon wat, net soos die lug daarbuite, met sterre besprinkel is. Al hierdie dinge, tesame met die gefluister wat die Groot Saal vul, laat Harry voel asof hy buite in 'n ligte windjie lê.

Een maal elke uur verskyn 'n onderwyser in die Saal om seker te maak dat alles stil is. Teen ongeveer drie-uur die oggend, toe baie studente reeds slaap, kom professor Dompeldorius in. Harry sien hoe hy rondsoek na Percy, wat tussen die slaapsakke rondsluip en die mense wat lê en gesels, berispe. Percy is net 'n klein entjie van Harry, Ron en Hermien af, wat vinnig maak of hulle slaap toe Dompeldorius se voetstappe nader kom.

"Enige teken van hom, professor?" vra Percy in 'n fluisterstem.

"Nee. Is alles hier onder beheer?"

"Alles is onder beheer, meneer."

"Goed. Dit maak nie sin om almal van hulle nou te skuif nie. Ek het n tydlike wag vir die Griffindor-portretopening gevind. Julle sal môre kan teruggaan."

"En die Vet Vrou, meneer?"

"Kruip weg in die kaart van Argyllshire op die tweede verdieping. Het blykbaar geweier om vir Swardt sonder die wagwoord in te laat; dis toe dat hy haar aangeval het. Sy is nog baie ontsteld, maar sodra sy bedaar het, sal mnr. Fillis haar restoreer."

Harry hoor hoe die deur na die Saal weer krakend oopgaan, en hoe nog voetstappe nader kom.

“Meneer die Hoof?” Dit is Snerp Harry lê doodstil en luister. “Die hele derde verdieping is deursoek. Hy’s nie daar nie. Fillis het die kerkers gedoen; ook niks nie.”

“Wat van die Sterrekundetoring? Professor Trelawney se kamer? Die Uilhuis?”

“Alles is deursoek . . .”

“Goed dan, Severus. Ek het nie regtig verwag dat Swardt nog sou talm nie.”

“Het u enige teorie oor hoe hy ingekom het, professor?” vra Snerp.

Harry lig sy kop baie effens van sy arms sodat sy ander oor ook oop is.

“Etlike, Severus, elkeen net so cnwaarskynlik as die volgende.”

Harry maak sy oë ’n fraksie oop en loer skeeloog op na waar hulle staan. Dompeldorius se rug is na hom gedraai, maar hy kan Percy se gesig sien, die ene aandag, en Snerp, wat kwaad lyk, se profiel.

“U onthou die gesprek wat ons gehad het, meneer die Hoof, net voor – h’m – die begin van die kwartaal?” sê Snerp, wat skaars sy lippe oopmaak, asof hy probeer om Percy uit die gesprek te hou.

“Ek onthou, Severus,” sê Dompeldorius, en daar is iets soos ’n waarskuwing in sy stem.

“Dit lyk – amper onmoontlik – dat Swardt by die skool kon inkom sonder hulp van binne. Ek het my voorbehoude duidelik uitgespreek oor die aanstelling van –”

“Ek glo nie dat iemand binne-in die kasteel vir Swardt gehelp het om in te kom nie,” sê Dompeldorius en sy stemtoon maak dit so duidelik dat die onderwerp afgehandel is dat Snerp nie antwoord nie. “Ek moet onder na die Dementors toe gaan,” sê Dompeldorius. “Ek het gesê ek sal hulle laat weet sodra die soektog afgehandel is.”

“Wou hulle dan nie help nie, meneer?” vra Percy.

“O ja,” sê Dompeldorius kil. “Ek is egter bevrees dat geen Dementor oor die kasteel se drumpels sal stap terwyl ek Skoolhoof is nie.”

Percy lyk effens afgehaal. Dompeldorius verlaat die saal vinnig en geluidloos. Snerp staan die skoolhoof ’n oomblik en agterna kyk, met ’n uitdrukking van diepe wrewel op sy gesig; toe loop hy ook.

Harry loer sydelings na Ron en Hermien. Albei se oë is oop en die sterreplafon word daarin weerkaats.

“Wat is dit nou weer?” vra Ron geluidloos.

Vir die volgende paar dae praat die skool oor niks anders as Sirius Swardt nie. Teorieë oor hoe hy by die kasteel ingekom het, word wilder en wilder; Hanna Abbott van Hoesenproes spandeer ’n groot deel van hul volgende Herbologie-klas om vir almal wat wil luister te vertel dat Swardt in ’n blomstruik kan verander.

Die Vei Vrou se beskadigde skildery is van die muur afgehaal en ver-

vang deur die portret van sir Cadogan en sy vet, grys ponie. Niemand is hiermee tevrede nie. Sir Cadogan spandeer die helfte van sy tyd daaraan om mense vir tweegevegte uit te daag, en vir die res dink hy ongelooflik moeilike wagwoorde uit, wat hy ten minste twee keer per dag verander.

“Hy’s getik in sy kop,” sê Septimus Floris ergerlik vir Percy. “Kan ons nie iemand anders kry nie?”

“Nie een van die ander prente wil die werk hê nie,” sê Percy. “Bang na wat met die Vet Vrou gebeur het. Sir Cadogan was die enigste een wat dapper genoeg was om ’n vrywilliger te wees.”

Sir Cadogan is egter die minste van Harry se bekommernisse. Hy word nou baie fyn dopgehou. Onderwysers soek redes om in die gange saam met hom te loop en Percy Weasley (wat, so reken Harry, op sy ma se bevele handel) loop soos ’n ontsettend waardige waghond al agter hom aan. Om alles te kroon, laat kom professor McGonagall vir Harry na haar kantoor met so ’n somber uitdrukking op haar gesig dat Harry se eerste gedagte is dat iemand dood is.

“Dit maak nie sin om dit langer vir jou weg te steek nie, Potter,” sê sy in ’n ernstige stem. “Ek weet dit gaan ’n skok vir jou wees, maar Sirius Swardt –”

“Ek weet hy is agter my aan,” sê Harry moeg. “Ek het gehoor toe Ron se pa vir sy ma vertel het. Mnr. Weasley werk by die Ministerie vir Toewerkuns.”

Professor McGonagall lyk uit die veld geslaan. Vir ’n rukkie kyk sy bloot na Harry, toe sê sy, “Ek sien! Wel, in daardie geval, Potter, sal jy verstaan hoekom ek dink dat dit nie ’n goeie idee is dat jy saans Kwiddiek oefen nie. Daar buite op die veld met slegs jou spanlede is jy besonder blootgestel, Potter –”

“Ons eerste wedstryd is op Saterdag!” sê Harry geskok. “Ek moet oefen, professor!”

Professor McGonagall kyk stip na hom. Harry weet dat sy die Griffindorspan se belange op die hart dra; dit was na alles sy wat hom in die eerste plek as Soeker voorgestel het. Met ingehoue asem wag hy.

“H’mmm . . .” Professor McGonagall staan op en tuur deur die venster na die Kwiddiekveld wat net-net deur die reën sigbaar is. “Wel . . . die vader weet, ek wil bitter graag hê dat ons die beker wen . . . maar, ten spyte daarvan, Potter . . . sal ek baie meer gerus wees as ’n onderwyser teenwoordig is. Ek sal vir Madame Hooch vra om ’n ogie oor jul oefensessies te hou.”

Die weer versleg geleidelik hoe nader die Kwiddiekwedstryd kom. Die onverskrokke Griffindorspan oefen harder as tevore onder die waaksame oog van Madame Hooch. Tydens hul laaste oefensessie voor Saterdag se wedstryd bring Oliver Wood vir sy span onwelkome nuus.

“Ons speel nie teen Slibberin nie!” sê hy vir hulle, en hy lyk bitterlik

ontstoke. "Flint het my nou net kom sien. Ons speel teen Hoesenproes."

"Hoekom?" vra die res van die span in 'n koor.

"Flint se verskoning is dat hul Soeker se arm nog steeds beseer is," sê Wood en kners sy tande ergerlik. "Dit is duidelik hoekom hulle dit doen. Wil nie in hierdie weer speel nie. Dink dit sal hul kanse bederf."

Dit het die hele dag lank hard gereën en 'n sterk wind het gewaai, en terwyl Wood praat, hoor hulle hoe die donderweer in die verte rammel.

"Malfoy se arm *makeer absoluut niks!*" sê Harry woedend. "Hy sit aan!"

"Ek weet dit, maar ons kan dit nie bewys nie," sê Wood bitter. "En die hele tyd oefen ons al daardie bewegings omdat ons gereken het dat ons teen Slibberin gaan speel, en nou is dit Hoesenproes, en hul styl is heeltemal anders. Hulle het 'n nuwe kaptein en Soeker, Cedric Diggory –"

Angelina, Alicia en Katie giggel skielik.

"Wat's so snaaks?" sê Wood, en frons oor hierdie ligsinnige gedrag.

"Hy's daardie stil, aantrekklike een, nê?" sê Angelina.

"Stil en sterk," sê Katie, en weer giggel hulle.

"Hy's net stil omdat hy te dig is om twee woorde na mekaar te sê," sê Fred ongeduldig. "Ek weet nie hoekom jy jou so opwerk nie, Oliver, Hoesenproes is niks werd nie. Laas toe ons teen hulle gespeel het, het Harry die Snip na skaars vyf minute gevang, onthou?"

"Ons speel in heeltemal ander omstandighede!" skree Wood en sy oë peul effens uit. "Diggory het 'n sterk span saamgestel! Hy's 'n uitstekende Soeker! Ek het geweet julle gaan so reageer! Ons kan nie laat slap lê nie! Ons moet gefokus bly! Slibberin probeer ons onkant vang! Ons moet wen!"

"Oliver, bedaar!" sê Fred en hy lyk ietwat verskrik. "Ons neem Hoesenproes baie ernstig op. Regtig."

Die dag voor die wedstryd bereik die wind stormsterkte en dit reën nog harder as tevore. Dit is so donker in die gange en klaskamers dat ekstra fakkels en lanterns aangesteek word. Die Slibberinspan lyk inderdaad baie in hul noppies met hulsell, veral Malfoy.

"Ag, as my arm tog net 'n bietjie beter gevoel het!" sug hy, terwyl die storm buite teen die vensters woed.

Harry kan hom oor niks anders bekommer as die wedstryd die volgende dag nie. Oliver Wood is gedurig besig om hom tussen klasse na Harry te haas en vir hom wenke te gee. Die derde keer toe dit gebeur, praat Wood so lank dat Harry skielik besef dat hy tien minute laat is vir Verdediging teen die Donker Kunste, en soontoe begin hardloop terwyl Wood agter hom aan skree, "Diggory het 'n baie vinnige swenkslag, Harry, jy moet dalk 'n lusvlug probeer –"

Harry kom skaats-skaats tot stilstand net buite die klaskamer vir Verde-

liging teen die Donker Kunste, ruk die deur oop en haas hom na binne.

"Jammer dat ek laat is, professor Lupin, ek –"

Dit is egter nie professor Lupin wat na hom toe opkyk van agter die onderwyser se lessenaar nie; dit is Snerp.

"Hierdie les het tien minute gelede begin, Potter, dus dink ek ons maak dit tien punte af van Griffindor. Sit."

Harry beweeg egter nie.

"Waar is professor Lupin?" vra hy.

"Hy het gesê dat hy te siek voel om vandag klas te gee," sê Snerp met 'n wrang glimlag. "Ek dink ek het vir jou gesê om te sit."

Harry bly net daar staan.

"Wat makeer hom?"

Snerp se swart oë glinster.

"Niks wat lewensbedreigend is nie," sê hy en lyk asof hy wens dit was.

"Nog vyf punte af van Griffindor, en as ek jou nog een keer moet vra om te sit, is dit vyftig."

Harry loop stadig na sy bank en gaan sit. Snerp kyk rond in die klas.

"Soos ek gesê het voor Potter ons onderbreek het, professor Lupin het geen rekords van die onderwerpe wat julle tot dusver behandel het, gelaat nie –"

"Verskoon my, meneer, maar ons het Boggarts, Rooikappies, Kappas en Grindeloë gedoen," sê Hermien vinnig, "en ons is op die punt om met –"

"Stil," sê Snerp koudweg. "Ek het nie vir inligting gevra nie. Ek lewer bloot kommentaar op professor Lupin se gebrek aan organisasie."

"Hy is die beste onderwyser vir Verdediging teen die Donker Kunste wat ons nog gehad het," sê Dean Thomas onbeskroomd, en daar is 'n gemurmur soos die res van die klas saamstem. Snerp lyk nog meer dreigend as ooit.

"Julle is maklik tevrede. Lupin het julle kwalik ooreis – ek sou verwag dat eerstejaars weet hoe om Rooikappies en Grindeloë te hanteer. Vandag bespreek ons –"

Harry kyk hoe hy deur die handboek blaai tot by die heel laaste hoofstuk wat Snerp moet weet hulle nog nie behandel het nie.

"– weerwolwe," sê Snerp.

"Maar meneer," sê Hermien wat haarself duidelik nie langer kan betuël nie, "ons is nie veronderstel om weerwolwe nou al te doen nie, ons moet met Hinkepinke begin –"

"Juffrou La Grange," sê Snerp in 'n stem wat dodelik kalm is, "ek was onder die indruk dat dit ek is wat hierdie les gee, nie jy nie. En ek sê nou vir julle om na bladsy driehonderd-vier-en-negentig te blaai." Hy kyk om hom. "Almal van julle! Nou!"

Met baie bitter sydelingse kyke en 'n onderlangse gebrom maak die klas hul boeke oop.

“Wie van julle kan vir my sê hoe om tussen ’n weerwolf en ’n ware wolf te onderskei?” vra Snerp.

Almal sit bewegingloos stil; almal behalwe Hermien wie se hand, soos so dikwels, hoog die lug in skiet.

“Enigiemand?” sê Snerp terwyl hy Hermien ignoreer. Sy wrang glimlag is terug. “Wil julle vir my sê dat professor Lupin nie eens vir julle geleer het wat die basiese verskil tussen –”

“Ons het mos gesê,” sê Parvati skielik, “dat ons nog nie by weerwolwe gekom het nie; ons is nog besig met –”

“Stilte!” grom Snerp. “Wel, wel, wel, ek het nooit kon dink dat ek ’n derdejaarklas sal teëkom wat nie eens ’n weerwolf herken as hulle een sien nie. Ek sal ’n punt daarvan maak om vir professor Dompeldorius te vertel hoe ver julle agter is.”

“Asseblief, meneer,” sê Hermien, wie se hand steeds in die lug is, “die weerwolf verskil van die ware wolf op etlike klein maniere. Die snoet van die weerwolf –”

“Dit is die tweede keer dat jy uit jou beurt praat, juffrou La Grange,” sê Snerp kil. “Nog vyf punte van Griffindor af net omdat jy so ’n onuitstaanbare klein wysneus is.”

Hermien word baie rooi, laat haar hand sak en staar na die vloer met haar oë vol tranes. Dit is ’n teken van hoeveel die klas Snerp haat dat hulle almal na hom gluur, want elkeen van hulle het Hermien al ten minste een keer ’n wysneus genoem; en Ron, wat vir Hermien ten minste twee keer elke week vertel dat sy wysneusig is, sê hardop, “U vra vir ons ’n vraag en sy ken die antwoord! Hoekom vra u as u nie die antwoord wil hoor nie?”

Die klas weet dadelik dat hy te ver gegaan het. Snerp stap stadig op Ron af, en almal hou hul asem op.

“Detensie, Weasley,” sê Snerp stroperig, sy gesig baie na aan Ron s’n. “En as ek jou ooit weer die manier waarop ek klas gee, hoor kritiseer, sal jy inderdaad baie jammer wees.”

Gedurende die res van die periode maak niemand ’n geluid nie. Hulle sit en maak notas oor weerwolwe uit hul handboeke, terwyl Snerp op en af tussen die rye banke sluip en die werk wat hulle vir professor Lupin gedoen het, bestudeer.

“Baie swak verduidelik . . . dit is nie korrek nie, die Kappa is meer algemeen in Mongolië . . . professor Lupin het hiervoor agt uit tien gegee? Ek sou nie drie punte daarvoor gegee het nie . . .”

Toe die klok uiteindelik lui, hou Snerp hulle terug.

“Julle sal elkeen ’n opstel skryf om by my ingehandig te word oor die maniere om ’n weerwolf te herken en dood te maak. Ek wil twee rolle perkament oor die onderwerp hê, en nie later as Maandagoggend nie. Dit is tyd dat iemand hierdie klas onder hande neem. Weasley, bly agter, ons moet jou detensie reël.”

Harry en Hermien verlaat die vertrek saam met die res van die klas wat wag tot hulle buite hoorafstand is voor hulle uitbars in 'n driftige tirade teen Snerp.

"Snerp was nog nooit so teenoor enige van die ander Verdediging teen die Donker Kunste-onderwysers nie, al wou hy ook hoe graag die werk hê," sê Harry vir Hermien. "Hoekom het hy sy mes in vir Lupin? Dink jy dis alles oor die Boggart?"

"Ek weet nie," sê Hermien peinsend. "Maar ek hoop regtig dat professor Lupin gou gesond sal word . . ."

Ron haal hulle vyf minute later in, en hy is briesend kwaad.

"Weet julle wat daardie –" (hy noem Snerp iets wat Hermien "Ron!" laat sê) "– wil hê ek moet doen? Ek moet die bedpanne in die siekeboeg gaan skrop. *Sonder towery!*" Hy trek sy asem diep in, en sy vuiste is gebal. "Hoekom het daardie Swardt nie in Snerp se kantoor gaan wegkruip nie, hê? Hy kon namens ons van hom ontslae geraak het!"

Die volgende oggend douvoordag is Harry wakker; so vroeg dat dit nog donker is. Vir 'n oomblik dink hy dat dit die geraas van die wind was wat hom wakker gemaak het; toe voel hy 'n koue briesie in sy nek en sit met eens penorent – Nurks dië poltergeist sweef langs hom en het hard in sy oor geblaas.

"Vir wat doen jy dit?" sê Harry ergerlik.

Nurks pof sy wange op, blaas hard en skiet agteruit deur die vertrek terwyl hy kekkellag.

Harry soek na sy wekker en kyk daarna. Dit is halfvyf. Terwyl hy vir Nurks slegsê, rol hy om en probeer om weer aan die slaap te raak, maar dit is baie moeilik om die rammelende onweer, die gehamer van die wind teen die kasteelmure en die veraf gekraak van die bome in die Verbode Woud te ignoreer noudat hy wakker is. Oor 'n paar uur is hy op die Kwiddiekveld en moet hy teen daardie storm baklei. Uiteindelik laat vaar hy alle gedagtes aan slaap, staan op, trek aan, tel sy Nimbus Tweeduisend op en loop saggies uit die slaapsaal.

Toe Harry by die deur kom, skuur iets teen sy been. Hy buk af, net betyds om vir Kromskeen aan die punt van sy borselstert te gryp en hom uit te sleep.

"Jy weet, ek dink Ron is reg oor jou," sê Harry agterdogtig vir Kromskeen. "Daar is baie muese in hierdie plek, gaan jaag hulle. Toe, weg is jy," voeg hy by terwyl hy vir Kromskeen met sy voet by die wenteltrap af help, "los Skille uit."

Die geluid van die storm is selfs harder in die geselskamer. Harry weet beter as om te verwag dat die wedstryd afgelas sal word; Kwiddiekwedstryde word nie vir kleinighede soos donderstorms gekanselleer nie. Tog voel hy uiters lugtig. Wood het vir Cedric Diggory in die gang uitgewys;

Diggory is 'n vyfdejaar en baie groter as Harry. Soekers is gewoonlik lig en vinnig, maar Diggory se gewig kan 'n voordeel wees in hierdie weer omdat hy nie so maklik van koers gewaai sal word nie.

Harry bring die ure voor sonop voor die vuur deur, en staan elke nou en dan op om vir Kromskeen van die seuns se wenteltrap af weg te keer. Uiteindelik dink Harry dat dit tyd moet wees vir ontbyt, dus klim hy alleen deur die portretopening.

“Staan en veg, jou brandsiek skurk!” gil sir Cadogan.

“Ag, bly stil,” gaap Harry.

'n Groot bak pap laat hom 'n bietjie beter voel; en teen die tyd dat hy met sy roosterbrood begin, daag die res van die span ook op.

“Dit gaan moeilik wees,” sê Wood wat niks eet nie.

“Moet jou nie so bekommer nie, Oliver,” sê Alicia troostend, “ons voel vere vir 'n bietjie reën.”

Dit is egter heelwat meer as net 'n bietjie reën. So gewild is Kwiddiek dat die hele skool soos gewoonlik opdaag om die wedstryd by te woon, maar hulle hardloop oor die gras na die Kwiddiekveld met hul koppe gebuig teen die verwoede wind en met sambrele wat uit hul hande geruk word. Net voor hy by die kleedkamers instap, sien Harry hoe Malfoy, Krabbe en Goliat wat op pad stadion toe is, van onder 'n reusesambreel na hom wys en lag.

Die span verkleed in hul skarlakenrooi mantels en wag vir Wood se gewone spanpraatjie, maar dit kom nie. Hy probeer etlike kere om iets te sê, maar maak net 'n vreemde hortende geluid, toe skud hy sy kop moedeloos en beduie dat hulle hom moet volg.

Die wind is so sterk dat hulle sywaarts strompel toe hulle op die veld loop. Indien die skare wel besig was om hulle toe te juig, is dit skaars hoorbaar bo die rammelende donderweer. Reëndruppels spat oor Harry se brilglase. Hoe op aarde gaan hy die Snip in hierdie weer sien?

Die Hoesenproesers in hul kanariegeel mantels kom van die oorkant af aangestap. Die kapteins loop na mekaar toe en skud hand; Diggory glimlag vir Wood; maar Wood, wat nou lyk asof hy kaakklem het, knik bloot. Harry sien hoe Madame Hooch se mond die woorde, “Klim op jul besems,” vorm. Hy trek sy regtervoet met 'n plasgeluid uit die modder en swaai dit oor sy Nimbus Tweeduisend. Madame Hooch sit haar fluitjie teen haar lippe en gee 'n blaas wat skril en veraf klink – en hulle trek weg.

Harry styg vinnig op, maar sy Nimbus swaai effens in die wind. Hy hou dit so goed moontlik op koers en draai terwyl hy deur die reën tuur.

Binne vyf minute is Harry nat tot op die vel en yskoud en hy kan sy spanmaats skaars sien, wat nog te sê die piepklein Snip. Hy vlieg vorentoe en agtertoe oor die veld verby dowwe rooi en geel vorms, sonder dat hy 'n idee het wat in die res van die wedstryd aangaan. Hy kan die kommentaar glad nie bo die wind hoor nie. Die skare is versteek agter 'n see

van mantels en verwaaië sambrele. Harry word twee keer amper deur 'n Moker afgestamp; sy visie deur die wasige brilglase is so swak dat hy hulle glad nie sien kom het nie.

Hy verloor tred met die tyd. Dit word moeiliker en moeiliker om die besem op koers te hou. Die lug word donkerder, asof die nag besluit het om vroeg te kom. Harry vlieg twee maal amper in 'n ander speler vas, sonder om te weet of dit 'n spanmaat of 'n teenstander is; almal is nou so nat en dit reën so hard dat hy skaars kan sien wie is wie . . .

Saam met die eerste weerligstraal kom die geluid van Madame Hooch se fluitjie; Harry kan net-net deur die digte reën sien hoe Wood se vae huiltelyn hom grond toe wink. Die hele span plas in die modder neer.

"Ek het gevra dat hulle die wedstryd 'n rukkie stop!" brul Wood vir sy span. "Komaan, hier onder –"

Hulle skuil aan die kant van die veld onder 'n groot sambreel; Harry haal sy bril af en vryf dit vinnig droog teen sy kleed.

"Wat is die telling?"

"Ons is vyftig punte voor," sê Wood, "maar as ons die Snip nie sommer gou kry nie, dan speel ons nog tot vannag toe."

"Ek het nie 'n kans met hierdie bril nie," sê Harry terwyl hy dit moede-loos deur die lug waai.

Op daardie oomblik verskyn Hermien langs hom; sy hou haar mantel oor haar kop en sy glimlag breed.

"Ek het 'n plan, Harry! Gee jou bril hier, gou!"

Hy gee dit vir haar aan en terwyl die hele span verbaas toekyk, tik Hermien met haar towerstaf daarteen en sê, "*Impervius!*"

"Hier!" sê sy toe sy dit vir Harry teruggee. "Nou sal dit die water afweer!"

Wood lyk asof hy haar kan soen.

"Briljant!" roep hy haar hees agterna toe sy in die skare verdwyn. "Goed, span, weg is ons!"

Hermien se towerspreuk doen sy werk. Harry is nog steeds blou van die koue en natter as wat hy nog in sy lewe was, maar hy kan sien. Vol nuwe moed por hy sy besem aan deur die onstuimige lug terwyl hy oral rondkyk vir die Snip, 'n Moker vermy, wegduik onder Diggory wat in die teenoorgestelde rigting laat vat . . .

Daar is nog 'n donderslag, onmiddellik gevolg deur gevurkte weerlig. Dit word al hoe gevaarliker. Harry moet die Snip kry, en gou –

Hy swenk, met die idee om terug na die middel van die veld te vlieg, maar op daardie oomblik verlig nog 'n weerligstraal die pawiljoen, en Harry sien iets wat hom heeltemal ontwig: die silhoeët van 'n enorme harige swart hond, duidelik afgeteken teen die lug, en bewegingloos in die heel boonste, leë ry sitplekke.

Harry se koue hande glip op die besem se steel en sy Nimbus val 'n

paar tree. Hy skud sy deurweekte kuif uit sy gesig en kyk deur vernoude oë na die pawiljoen. Die hond is weg.

"Harry!" roep Wood skielik benoud van agter Griffindor se doelpale.

"Harry, kyk agter jou!"

Harry kyk verwilderd om. Cedric Diggory vlieg in volle vaart op teen die kant van die veld, en in die reëngelaaide lug tussen hulle glinster 'n klein spikkeltjie goud . . .

Met 'n skok van paniek trek Harry homself plat op sy besem se stee en pyl op die Snip af.

"Komaan!" grom hy vir sy Nimbus, terwyl die reën hom in die gesig slaan. "Vinniger!"

Iets vreemds is egter aan die gebeur. 'n Eienaardige stilte val oor die stadion. Die wind, hoewel nog net so sterk as tevore, het ophou brul. Dis asof iemand die klank afgedraai het, asof Harry skielik doof geword het – wat is aan die gang?

Toe breek 'n aaklige, bekende koue golf oor hom, binne-in hom, net toe hy daarvan bewus word dat iets op die veld onder hom beweeg . . .

Nog voor hy behoorlik daaroor kan dink, beweeg Harry se oë weg van die Snip, en hy kyk af.

Daar onder staan ten minste 'n honderd Dementors, hul verskuilde gesigte na bo, na hom gerig. Dis asof ysige water in sy borskas opstoot sodat sy binnegoed vries. Dan hoor hy dit weer . . . iemand wat skree, skree, hier in sy kop . . . 'n vrou . . .

"Nie Harry nie, nie Harry nie, asseblief, nie Harry nie!"

"Gee pad, jou verspotte vroumens . . . gee dadelik pad . . ."

"Nie Harry nie, asseblief nie, neem my eerder, maak my liever dood –"

Verlammente, warrelende mis vul Harry se brein . . . Wat maak hy? Hoekom vlieg hy? Hy moet haar help . . . sy gaan sterf . . . sy gaan vermoor word . . .

Hy val, val deur die ysige mis.

"Nie Harry nie! Asseblief . . . wees genadig . . . wees genadig . . ."

'n Skril stem lag, die vrou skree, en Harry is van niks meer bewus nie.

"Gelukkig was die grond so sag."

"Ek was seker hy's dood."

"Hy't nie eens sy bril gebreek nie."

Harry hoor hoe die stemme bo hom fluister, maar dit maak geen sin nie. Hy het nie 'n idee waar hy is of hoe hy daar gekom het nie, of waarmee hy besig was voor hy daar gekom het nie. Al wat hy weet, is dat sy hele liggaam pyn asof hy vreeslik geslaan is.

"Dit was die verskriklikste ding wat ek nog ooit gesien het."

Verskriklik . . . die verskriklikste ding . . . swart figure in mantels en kappe . . . koue . . . geskree . . .

Harry se oë vlieg oop. Hy lê in die siekeboeg. Griffindor se Kwiddiekspan, bespat met modder van hul koppe tot hul tone, staan om sy bed. Ron en Hermien is ook daar en lyk asof hulle so pas uit 'n swembad geklim het.

"Harry!" sê Fred wat besonder wit onder die modder lyk. "Hoe voel jy?"

Dis asof Harry se geheue vinnig vorentoe draai. Die weerlig . . . die Grim . . . die Snip . . . en die Dementors . . .

"Wat het gebeur?" vra hy en kom so skielik orent dat almal na hul neems snak.

"Jy't afgeval," sê Fred. "Moes – wat – twintig meter gewees het?"

"Ons dag jy's dood," sê Alicia, wat nog bewe.

Hermien maak 'n klein piepgeluidjie. Haar oë is besonder bloedbe-
lope.

"Maar die wedstryd," sê Harry. "Wat het gebeur? Moet ons oorspeel?"

Niemand sê 'n woord nie. Die vreeslike waarheid val soos 'n klip op Harry se gemoed.

"Ons het nie – verloor nie?"

"Diggory het die Snip gekry," sê George. "Net na jy geval het. Hy't nie besef wat gebeur het nie. Toe hy terugkyk en jou op die grond sien lê, het hy probeer om dit te kanselleer. Gevra dat ons moet oorspeel. Maar hulle het fêrplie gewen . . . tot Wood erken dit."

"Waar is Wood?" sê Harry, wat skielik besef dat hy nie daar is nie.

"Nog in die stort," sê Fred. "Ons dink hy probeer homself verdrink."

Harry laat sak sy kop op sy knieë en sy hande vlieg na sy hare. Fred gryp sy skouer en skud dit ruweg.

"Komaan, Harry, jy't die Snip nog nooit tevore gemis nie."

"Daar moet 'n keer wees dat jy dit nie kry nie," sê George.

"Dis nog nie oor nie," sê Fred. "Ons het met 'n honderd punte verloor, oukei? As Hoesenproes dus teen Raweklou verloor en ons vir Raweklou klop en Slibberin . . ."

"Hoesenproes sal met ten minste tweehonderd punte moet verloor," sê George.

"Maar as hulle vir Raweklou klop . . ."

"Vergeet daarvan, Raweklou is te goed. Maar as Slibberin teen Hoesenproes verloor . . ."

"Dit hang alles van die punte af – 'n speling van 'n honderd na albei kante toe –"

Harry lê net daar, sonder om 'n woord te sê. Hulle het verloor . . . vir die eerste keer ooit het hy 'n Kwiddiekwedstryd verloor.

Sowat tien minute later kom Madame Pomfrey nader om vir die span te sê dat hulle hom in vrede moet laat.

"Ons sal jou later kom besoek," sê Fred. "Moenie jouself straf nie, Harry, jy's nog steeds die beste Soeker wat ons ooit gehad het."

Die span loop uit en laat 'n spoor modder agter. Madame Pomfrey maak die deur agter hulle toe en lyk afkeurend. Ron en Hermien beweeg nader aan Harry se bed.

“Dompeldorius was ontsettend kwaad,” sê Hermien in 'n bewende stem. “Ek het hom nog nooit voorheen so gesien nie. Toe jy val, het hy op die veld gehardloop, sy towerstaf gewaai en jou spoed soort van gebreek voor jy die grond getref het. Toe't hy, sy towerstaf na die Dementors toe geswaai. Silwer goed na hulle geskiet. Hulle's dadelik daar weg . . . hy was woedend omdat hulle op die terrein gekom het, ons het hom gehoor –”

“Toe't hy vir jou 'n draagbaar getoor,” sê Ron, “en skool toe geloop met jou wat daarop sweef. Almal het gedink dat jy . . .”

Sy stem sterf weg, maar Harry merk dit skaars. Hy dink aan wat die Dementors aan hom gedoen het . . . aan die skreeuende stem. Hy kyk op, en toe hy sien met hoeveel kommer Ron en Hermien na hom kyk, probeer hy dadelik aan iets gewoons dink om te sê.

“Het iemand my Nimbus gebring?”

Ron en Hermien kyk vinnig na mekaar.

“H'm –”

“Wat?” sê Harry en kyk van die een na die ander.

“Wel, . . . toe jy afgeval het, het dit weggewaai,” sê Hermien aarselend.

“En?”

“En dit het in – in – o, Harry – dit het in die Woelige Wilg vasgevlieg.”

Harry se binnegoed trek saam. Die Woelige Wilg is 'n uiters gewelddadige boom wat in die middel van die kasteelterrein staan.

“En?” vra hy, hoewel hy die antwoord vrees.

“Wel, jy weet hoe die Woelige Wilg is,” sê Ron. “Dit – dit hou nie daarvan om in vasgevlieg te word nie.”

“Professor Flickerpitt het dit teruggebring net voor jy bygekom het,” sê Hermien in 'n baie klein stemmetjie.

Sy steek haar hand stadig uit na die sak aan haar voete, dop dit om en keer 'n dosyn stukkies versplinterde hout en takkies op die bed uit, die enigste oorblyfsels van Harry se getroue, en uiteindelik verslane, besemstok.

CHAPTER TEN



THE MARAUDER'S MAP

Madam Pomfrey insisted on keeping Harry in the hospital wing for the rest of the weekend. He didn't argue or complain, but he wouldn't let her throw away the shattered remnants of his Nimbus Two Thousand. He knew he was being stupid, knew that the Nimbus was beyond repair, but Harry couldn't help it; he felt as though he'd lost one of his best friends.

He had a stream of visitors, all intent on cheering him up: Hagrid sent him a bunch of earwiggy flowers that looked like yellow cabbages, and Ginny Weasley, blushing furiously, turned up with a get-well card she had made herself, which sang shrilly unless Harry kept it shut under his bowl of fruit. The Gryffindor team visited again on Sunday morning, this time accompanied by Wood, who told Harry (in a hollow, dead sort of voice) that he didn't blame him in the

slightest. Ron and Hermione left Harry's bedside only at night. But nothing anyone said or did could make Harry feel any better, because they knew only half of what was troubling him.

He hadn't told anyone about the Grim, not even Ron and Hermione, because he knew Ron would panic and Hermione would scoff. The fact remained, however, that it had now appeared twice, and both appearances had been followed by near-fatal accidents; the first time, he had nearly been run over by the Knight Bus; the second, fallen fifty feet from his broomstick. Was the Grim going to haunt him until he actually died? Was he going to spend the rest of his life looking over his shoulder for the beast?

And then there were the dementors. Harry felt sick and humiliated every time he thought of them. Everyone said the dementors were horrible, but no one else collapsed every time they went near one. No one else heard echoes in their head of their dying parents.

Because Harry knew who that screaming voice belonged to now. He had heard her words, heard them over and over again during the night hours in the hospital wing while he lay awake, staring at the strips of moonlight on the ceiling. When the dementors approached him, he heard the last moments of his mother's life, her attempts to protect him, Harry, from Lord Voldemort, and Voldemort's laughter before he murdered her. . . . Harry dozed fitfully, sinking into dreams full of clammy, rotted hands and petrified pleading, jerking awake to dwell again on his mother's voice.

It was a relief to return to the noise and bustle of the main school on Monday, where he was forced to think about other things, even if he had to endure Draco Malfoy's taunting. Malfoy was almost beside

himself with glee at Gryffindor's defeat. He had finally taken off his bandages, and celebrated having the full use of both arms again by doing spirited imitations of Harry falling off his broom. Malfoy spent much of their next Potions class doing dementor imitations across the dungeon; Ron finally cracked and flung a large, slippery crocodile heart at Malfoy, which hit him in the face and caused Snape to take fifty points from Gryffindor.

"If Snape's teaching Defense Against the Dark Arts again, I'm skiving off," said Ron as they headed toward Lupin's classroom after lunch. "Check who's in there, Hermione."

Hermione peered around the classroom door.

"It's okay!"

Professor Lupin was back at work. It certainly looked as though he had been ill. His old robes were hanging more loosely on him and there were dark shadows beneath his eyes; nevertheless, he smiled at the class as they took their seats, and they burst at once into an explosion of complaints about Snape's behavior while Lupin had been ill.

"It's not fair, he was only filling in, why should he give us homework?"

"We don't know anything about werewolves —"

"— two rolls of parchment!"

"Did you tell Professor Snape we haven't covered them yet?" Lupin asked, frowning slightly.

The babble broke out again.

"Yes, but he said we were really behind —"

"— he wouldn't listen —"

“— two rolls of parchment!”

Professor Lupin smiled at the look of indignation on every face.

“Don’t worry. I’ll speak to Professor Snape. You don’t have to do the essay.”

“Oh *no*,” said Hermione, looking very disappointed. “I’ve already finished it!”

They had a very enjoyable lesson. Professor Lupin had brought along a glass box containing a hinkypunk, a little one-legged creature who looked as though he were made of wisps of smoke, rather frail and harmless-looking.

“Lures travelers into bogs,” said Professor Lupin as they took notes. “You notice the lantern dangling from his hand? Hops ahead — people follow the light — then —”

The hinkypunk made a horrible squelching noise against the glass.

When the bell rang, everyone gathered up their things and headed for the door, Harry among them, but —

“Wait a moment, Harry,” Lupin called. “I’d like a word.”

Harry doubled back and watched Professor Lupin covering the hinkypunk’s box with a cloth.

“I heard about the match,” said Lupin, turning back to his desk and starting to pile books into his briefcase, “and I’m sorry about your broomstick. Is there any chance of fixing it?”

“No,” said Harry. “The tree smashed it to bits.”

Lupin sighed.

“They planted the Whomping Willow the same year that I arrived at Hogwarts. People used to play a game, trying to get near enough to touch the trunk. In the end, a boy called Davey Gudgeon nearly lost

an eye, and we were forbidden to go near it. No broomstick would have a chance.”

“Did you hear about the dementors too?” said Harry with difficulty.

Lupin looked at him quickly.

“Yes, I did. I don’t think any of us have seen Professor Dumbledore that angry. They have been growing restless for some time . . . furious at his refusal to let them inside the grounds. . . . I suppose they were the reason you fell?”

“Yes,” said Harry. He hesitated, and then the question he had to ask burst from him before he could stop himself. “*Why?* Why do they affect me like that? Am I just — ?”

“It has nothing to do with weakness,” said Professor Lupin sharply, as though he had read Harry’s mind. “The dementors affect you worse than the others because there are horrors in your past that the others don’t have.”

A ray of wintery sunlight fell across the classroom, illuminating Lupin’s gray hairs and the lines on his young face.

“Dementors are among the foulest creatures that walk this earth. They infest the darkest, filthiest places, they glory in decay and despair, they drain peace, hope, and happiness out of the air around them. Even Muggles feel their presence, though they can’t see them. Get too near a dementor and every good feeling, every happy memory will be sucked out of you. If it can, the dementor will feed on you long enough to reduce you to something like itself . . . soulless and evil. You’ll be left with nothing but the worst experiences of your life. And the worst that happened to *you*, Harry, is enough to make

anyone fall off their broom. You have nothing to feel ashamed of.”

“When they get near me —” Harry stared at Lupin’s desk, his throat tight. “I can hear Voldemort murdering my mum.”

Lupin made a sudden motion with his arm as though to grip Harry’s shoulder, but thought better of it. There was a moment’s silence, then —

“Why did they have to come to the match?” said Harry bitterly.

“They’re getting hungry,” said Lupin coolly, shutting his briefcase with a snap. “Dumbledore won’t let them into the school, so their supply of human prey has dried up. . . . I don’t think they could resist the large crowd around the Quidditch field. All that excitement . . . emotions running high . . . it was their idea of a feast.”

“Azkaban must be terrible,” Harry muttered. Lupin nodded grimly.

“The fortress is set on a tiny island, way out to sea, but they don’t need walls and water to keep the prisoners in, not when they’re all trapped inside their own heads, incapable of a single cheerful thought. Most of them go mad within weeks.”

“But Sirius Black escaped from them,” Harry said slowly. “He got away. . . .”

Lupin’s briefcase slipped from the desk; he had to stoop quickly to catch it.

“Yes,” he said, straightening up, “Black must have found a way to fight them. I wouldn’t have believed it possible. . . . Dementors are supposed to drain a wizard of his powers if he is left with them too long. . . .”

“*You* made that dementor on the train back off,” said Harry suddenly.

“There are — certain defenses one can use,” said Lupin. “But there was only one dementor on the train. The more there are, the more difficult it becomes to resist.”

“What defenses?” said Harry at once. “Can you teach me?”

“I don’t pretend to be an expert at fighting dementors, Harry — quite the contrary. . . .”

“But if the dementors come to another Quidditch match, I need to be able to fight them —”

Lupin looked into Harry’s determined face, hesitated, then said, “Well . . . all right. I’ll try and help. But it’ll have to wait until next term, I’m afraid. I have a lot to do before the holidays. I chose a very inconvenient time to fall ill.”

What with the promise of anti-dementor lessons from Lupin, the thought that he might never have to hear his mother’s death again, and the fact that Ravenclaw flattened Hufflepuff in their Quidditch match at the end of November, Harry’s mood took a definite upturn. Gryffindor were not out of the running after all, although they could not afford to lose another match. Wood became repossessed of his manic energy, and worked his team as hard as ever in the chilly haze of rain that persisted into December. Harry saw no hint of a dementor within the grounds. Dumbledore’s anger seemed to be keeping them at their stations at the entrances.

Two weeks before the end of the term, the sky lightened suddenly to a dazzling, opaline white and the muddy grounds were revealed one morning covered in glittering frost. Inside the castle, there was a buzz of Christmas in the air. Professor Flitwick, the Charms teacher,

had already decorated his classroom with shimmering lights that turned out to be real, fluttering fairies. The students were all happily discussing their plans for the holidays. Both Ron and Hermione had decided to remain at Hogwarts, and though Ron said it was because he couldn't stand two weeks with Percy, and Hermione insisted she needed to use the library, Harry wasn't fooled; they were doing it to keep him company, and he was very grateful.

To everyone's delight except Harry's, there was to be another Hogsmeade trip on the very last weekend of the term.

"We can do all our Christmas shopping there!" said Hermione. "Mum and Dad would really love those Toothflossing Stringmints from Honeydukes!"

Resigned to the fact that he would be the only third year staying behind again, Harry borrowed a copy of *Which Broomstick* from Wood, and decided to spend the day reading up on the different makes. He had been riding one of the school brooms at team practice, an ancient Shooting Star, which was very slow and jerky, he definitely needed a new broom of his own.

On the Saturday morning of the Hogsmeade trip, Harry bid good-bye to Ron and Hermione, who were wrapped in cloaks and scarves, then turned up the marble staircase alone, and headed back toward Gryffindor Tower. Snow had started to fall outside the windows, and the castle was very still and quiet.

"Psst — Harry!"

He turned, halfway along the third-floor corridor, to see Fred and George peering out at him from behind a statue of a humpbacked, one-eyed witch.

“What are you doing?” said Harry curiously. “How come you’re not going to Hogsmeade?”

“We’ve come to give you a bit of festive cheer before we go,” said Fred, with a mysterious wink. “Come in here. . . .”

He nodded toward an empty classroom to the left of the one-eyed statue. Harry followed Fred and George inside. George closed the door quietly and then turned, beaming, to look at Harry.

“Early Christmas present for you, Harry,” he said.

Fred pulled something from inside his cloak with a flourish and laid it on one of the desks. It was a large, square, very worn piece of parchment with nothing written on it. Harry, suspecting one of Fred and George’s jokes, stared at it.

“What’s that supposed to be?”

“This, Harry, is the secret of our success,” said George, patting the parchment fondly.

“It’s a wrench, giving it to you,” said Fred, “but we decided last night, your need’s greater than ours.”

“Anyway, we know it by heart,” said George. “We bequeath it to you. We don’t really need it anymore.”

“And what do I need with a bit of old parchment?” said Harry.

“A bit of old parchment!” said Fred, closing his eyes with a grimace as though Harry had mortally offended him. “Explain, George.”

“Well . . . when we were in our first year, Harry — young, carefree, and innocent —”

Harry snorted. He doubted whether Fred and George had ever been innocent.

“— well, more innocent than we are now — we got into a spot of bother with Filch.”

“We let off a Dungbomb in the corridor and it upset him for some reason —”

“So he hauled us off to his office and started threatening us with the usual —”

“— detention —”

“— disembowelment —”

“— and we couldn’t help noticing a drawer in one of his filing cabinets marked *Confiscated and Highly Dangerous*. ”

“Don’t tell me —” said Harry, starting to grin.

“Well, what would you’ve done?” said Fred. “George caused a diversion by dropping another Dungbomb, I whipped the drawer open and grabbed — *this*. ”

“It’s not as bad as it sounds, you know,” said George. “We don’t reckon Filch ever found out how to work it. He probably suspected what it was, though, or he wouldn’t have confiscated it.”

“And you know how to work it?”

“Oh yes,” said Fred, smirking. “This little beauty’s taught us more than all the teachers in this school.”

“You’re winding me up,” said Harry, looking at the ragged old bit of parchment.

“Oh, are we?” said George.

He took out his wand, touched the parchment lightly, and said, “*I solemnly swear that I am up to no good.* ”

And at once, thin ink lines began to spread like a spider’s web

from the point that George's wand had touched. They joined each other, they crisscrossed, they fanned into every corner of the parchment; then words began to blossom across the top, great, curly green words, that proclaimed:

*Messrs. Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, and Prongs Purveyors of
Aids to Magical Mischief-Makers are proud to present*

THE MARAUDER'S MAP

It was a map showing every detail of the Hogwarts castle and grounds. But the truly remarkable thing were the tiny ink dots moving around it, each labeled with a name in minuscule writing. Astounded, Harry bent over it. A labeled dot in the top left corner showed that Professor Dumbledore was pacing his study; the caretaker's cat, Mrs. Norris, was prowling the second floor; and Peeves the Poltergeist was currently bouncing around the trophy room. And as Harry's eyes traveled up and down the familiar corridors, he noticed something else.

This map showed a set of passages he had never entered. And many of them seemed to lead —

“Right into Hogsmeade,” said Fred, tracing one of them with his finger. “There are seven in all. Now, Filch knows about these four” — he pointed them out — “but we're sure we're the only ones who know about *these*. Don't bother with the one behind the mirror on the fourth floor. We used it until last winter, but it's caved in — completely blocked. And we don't reckon anyone's ever used this one, because the Whomping Willow's planted right over the entrance. But this one here, this one leads right into the cellar of Honeydukes.

"We've used it loads of times. And as you might've noticed, the entrance is right outside this room, through that one-eyed old crone's hump."

"Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, and Prongs," sighed George, patting the heading of the map. "We owe them so much."

"Noble men, working tirelessly to help a new generation of lawbreakers," said Fred solemnly.

"Right," said George briskly. "Don't forget to wipe it after you've used it —"

"— or anyone can read it," Fred said warningly.

"Just tap it again and say, 'Mischief managed!' And it'll go blank."

"So, young Harry," said Fred, in an uncanny impersonation of Percy, "mind you behave yourself."

"See you in Honeydukes," said George, winking.

They left the room, both smirking in a satisfied sort of way.

Harry stood there, gazing at the miraculous map. He watched the tiny ink Mrs. Norris turn left and pause to sniff at something on the floor. If Filch really didn't know . . . he wouldn't have to pass the dementors at all. . . .

But even as he stood there, flooded with excitement, something Harry had once heard Mr. Weasley say came floating out of his memory.

Never trust anything that can think for itself, if you can't see where it keeps its brain.

This map was one of those dangerous magical objects Mr. Weasley had been warning against. . . . *Aids for Magical Mischief-Makers* . . . but then, Harry reasoned, he only wanted to use it to get

into Hogsmeade, it wasn't as though he wanted to steal anything or attack anyone . . . and Fred and George had been using it for years without anything horrible happening . . .

Harry traced the secret passage to Honeydukes with his finger.

Then, quite suddenly, as though following orders, he rolled up the map, stuffed it inside his robes, and hurried to the door of the classroom. He opened it a couple of inches. There was no one outside. Very carefully, he edged out of the room and behind the statue of the one-eyed witch.

What did he have to do? He pulled out the map again and saw, to his astonishment, that a new ink figure had appeared upon it, labeled *Harry Potter*. This figure was standing exactly where the real Harry was standing, about halfway down the third-floor corridor. Harry watched carefully. His little ink self appeared to be tapping the witch with his minute wand. Harry quickly took out his real wand and tapped the statue. Nothing happened. He looked back at the map. The tiniest speech bubble had appeared next to his figure. The word inside said, "*Dissendium*."

"*Dissendium!*" Harry whispered, tapping the stone witch again.

At once, the statue's hump opened wide enough to admit a fairly thin person. Harry glanced quickly up and down the corridor, then tucked the map away again, hoisted himself into the hole headfirst, and pushed himself forward.

He slid a considerable way down what felt like a stone slide, then landed on cold, damp earth. He stood up, looking around. It was pitch dark. He held up his wand, muttered, "*Lumos!*" and saw that he was in a very narrow, low, earthy passageway. He raised the map,

tapped it with the tip of his wand, and muttered, "Mischief managed!" The map went blank at once. He folded it carefully, tucked it inside his robes, then, heart beating fast, both excited and apprehensive, he set off.

The passage twisted and turned, more like the burrow of a giant rabbit than anything else. Harry hurried along it, stumbling now and then on the uneven floor, holding his wand out in front of him.

It took ages, but Harry had the thought of Honeydukes to sustain him. After what felt like an hour, the passage began to rise. Panting, Harry sped up, his face hot, his feet very cold.

Ten minutes later, he came to the foot of some worn stone steps, which rose out of sight above him. Careful not to make any noise, Harry began to climb. A hundred steps, two hundred steps, he lost count as he climbed, watching his feet. . . . Then, without warning, his head hit something hard.

It seemed to be a trapdoor. Harry stood there, massaging the top of his head, listening. He couldn't hear any sounds above him. Very slowly, he pushed the trapdoor open and peered over the edge.

He was in a cellar, which was full of wooden crates and boxes. Harry climbed out of the trapdoor and replaced it — it blended so perfectly with the dusty floor that it was impossible to tell it was there. Harry crept slowly toward the wooden staircase that led upstairs. Now he could definitely hear voices, not to mention the tinkle of a bell and the opening and shutting of a door.

Wondering what he ought to do, he suddenly heard a door open much closer at hand; somebody was about to come downstairs.

"And get another box of Jelly Slugs, dear, they've nearly cleaned

us out —” said a woman’s voice.

A pair of feet was coming down the staircase. Harry leapt behind an enormous crate and waited for the footsteps to pass. He heard the man shifting boxes against the opposite wall. He might not get another chance —

Quickly and silently, Harry dodged out from his hiding place and climbed the stairs; looking back, he saw an enormous backside and shiny bald head, buried in a box. Harry reached the door at the top of the stairs, slipped through it, and found himself behind the counter of Honeydukes — he ducked, crept sideways, and then straightened up.

Honeydukes was so crowded with Hogwarts students that no one looked twice at Harry. He edged among them, looking around, and suppressed a laugh as he imagined the look that would spread over Dudley’s piggy face if he could see where Harry was now.

There were shelves upon shelves of the most succulent-looking sweets imaginable. Creamy chunks of nougat, shimmering pink squares of coconut ice, fat, honey-colored toffees; hundreds of different kinds of chocolate in neat rows; there was a large barrel of Every Flavor Beans, and another of Fizzing Whizbees, the levitating sherbet balls that Ron had mentioned; along yet another wall were “Special Effects” sweets: Drooble’s Best Blowing Gum (which filled a room with bluebell-colored bubbles that refused to pop for days), the strange, splintery Toothflossing Stringmints, tiny black Pepper Imps (“Breathe fire for your friends!”), Ice Mice (“Hear your teeth chatter and squeak!”), peppermint creams shaped like toads (“Hop realistically in the stomach!”), fragile sugar-spun quills, and exploding bonbons.

Harry squeezed himself through a crowd of sixth years and saw a sign hanging in the farthest corner of the shop (UNUSUAL TASTES). Ron and Hermione were standing underneath it, examining a tray of blood-flavored lollipops. Harry sneaked up behind them.

“Ugh, no, Harry won’t want one of those, they’re for vampires, I expect,” Hermione was saying.

“How about these?” said Ron, shoving a jar of Cockroach Clusters under Hermione’s nose.

“Definitely not,” said Harry.

Ron nearly dropped the jar.

“*Harry!*” squealed Hermione. “What are you doing here? How — how did you — ?”

“Wow!” said Ron, looking very impressed, “you’ve learned to Apparate!”

“‘Course I haven’t,” said Harry. He dropped his voice so that none of the sixth years could hear him and told them all about the Marauder’s Map.

“How come Fred and George never gave it to *me!*” said Ron, outraged. “I’m their brother!”

“But Harry isn’t going to keep it!” said Hermione, as though the idea were ludicrous. “He’s going to hand it in to Professor McGonagall, aren’t you, Harry?”

“No, I’m not!” said Harry.

“Are you mad?” said Ron, goggling at Hermione. “Hand in something that good?”

“If I hand it in, I’ll have to say where I got it! Filch would know. Fred and George had nicked it!”

“But what about Sirius Black?” Hermione hissed. “He could be using one of the passages on that map to get into the castle! The teachers have got to know!”

“He can’t be getting in through a passage,” said Harry quickly. “There are seven secret tunnels on the map, right? Fred and George reckon Filch already knows about four of them. And of the other three — one of them’s caved in, so no one can get through it. One of them’s got the Whomping Willow planted over the entrance, so you can’t get out of it. And the one I just came through — well — it’s really hard to see the entrance to it down in the cellar, so unless he knew it was there . . .”

Harry hesitated. What if Black did know the passage was there? Ron, however, cleared his throat significantly, and pointed to a notice pasted on the inside of the sweetshop door.

————— BY ORDER OF —————
THE MINISTRY OF MAGIC

Customers are reminded that until further notice, dementors will be patrolling the streets of Hogsmeade every night after sundown. This measure has been put in place for the safety of Hogsmeade residents and will be lifted upon the recapture of Sirius Black. It is therefore advisable that you complete your shopping well before nightfall.

Merry Christmas!

“See?” said Ron quietly. “I’d like to see Black try and break into Honeydukes with dementors swarming all over the village. Anyway, Hermione, the Honeydukes owners would hear a break-in, wouldn’t

they? They live over the shop!”

“Yes, but — but —” Hermione seemed to be struggling to find another problem. “Look, Harry still shouldn’t be coming into Hogsmeade. He hasn’t got a signed form! If anyone finds out, he’ll be in so much trouble! And it’s not nightfall yet — what if Sirius Black turns up today? Now?”

“He’d have a job spotting Harry in this,” said Ron, nodding through the mullioned windows at the thick, swirling snow. “Come on, Hermione, it’s Christmas. Harry deserves a break.”

Hermione bit her lip, looking extremely worried.

“Are you going to report me?” Harry asked her, grinning.

“Oh — of course not — but honestly, Harry —”

“Seen the Fizzing Whizbees, Harry?” said Ron, grabbing him and leading him over to their barrel. “And the Jelly Slugs? And the Acid Pops? Fred gave me one of those when I was seven — it burnt a hole right through my tongue. I remember Mum walloping him with her broomstick” Ron stared broodingly into the Acid Pop box. “Reckon Fred’d take a bit of Cockroach Cluster if I told him they were peanuts?”

When Ron and Hermione had paid for all their sweets, the three of them left Honeydukes for the blizzard outside.

Hogsmeade looked like a Christmas card; the little thatched cottages and shops were all covered in a layer of crisp snow; there were holly wreaths on the doors and strings of enchanted candles hanging in the trees.

Harry shivered; unlike the other two, he didn’t have his cloak. They headed up the street, heads bowed against the wind, Ron and

Hermione shouting through their scarves.

“That’s the post office —”

“Zonko’s is up there —”

“We could go up to the Shrieking Shack —”

“Tell you what,” said Ron, his teeth chattering, “shall we go for a butterbeer in the Three Broomsticks?”

Harry was more than willing; the wind was fierce and his hands were freezing, so they crossed the road, and in a few minutes were entering the tiny inn.

It was extremely crowded, noisy, warm, and smoky. A curvy sort of woman with a pretty face was serving a bunch of rowdy warlocks up at the bar.

“That’s Madam Rosmerta,” said Ron. “I’ll get the drinks, shall I?” he added, going slightly red.

Harry and Hermione made their way to the back of the room, where there was a small, vacant table between the window and a handsome Christmas tree, which stood next to the fireplace. Ron came back five minutes later, carrying three foaming tankards of hot butterbeer.

“Merry Christmas!” he said happily, raising his tankard.

Harry drank deeply. It was the most delicious thing he’d ever tasted and seemed to heat every bit of him from the inside.

A sudden breeze ruffled his hair. The door of the Three Broomsticks had opened again. Harry looked over the rim of his tankard and choked.

Professors McGonagall and Flitwick had just entered the pub with a flurry of snowflakes, shortly followed by Hagrid, who was deep in

conversation with a portly man in a lime-green bowler hat and a pinstriped cloak — Cornelius Fudge, Minister of Magic.

In an instant, Ron and Hermione had both placed hands on the top of Harry's head and forced him off his stool and under the table. Dripping with butterbeer and crouching out of sight, Harry clutched his empty tankard and watched the teachers' and Fudge's feet move toward the bar, pause, then turn and walk right toward him.

Somewhere above him, Hermione whispered, "*Mobiliarbus!*"

The Christmas tree beside their table rose a few inches off the ground, drifted sideways, and landed with a soft thump right in front of their table, hiding them from view. Staring through the dense lower branches, Harry saw four sets of chair legs move back from the table right beside theirs, then heard the grunts and sighs of the teachers and minister as they sat down.

Next he saw another pair of feet, wearing sparkly turquoise high heels, and heard a woman's voice.

"A small gillywater —"

"Mine," said Professor McGonagall's voice.

"Four pints of mulled mead —"

"Ta, Rosmerta," said Hagrid.

"A cherry syrup and soda with ice and umbrella —"

"Mmm!" said Professor Flitwick, smacking his lips.

"So you'll be the red currant rum, Minister."

"Thank you, Rosmerta, m'dear," said Fudge's voice. "Lovely to see you again, I must say. Have one yourself, won't you? Come and join us. . . ."

"Well, thank you very much, Minister."

Harry watched the glittering heels march away and back again. His heart was pounding uncomfortably in his throat. Why hadn't it occurred to him that this was the last weekend of term for the teachers too? And how long were they going to sit there? He needed time to sneak back into Honeydukes if he wanted to return to school tonight. . . . Hermione's leg gave a nervous twitch next to him.

"So, what brings you to this neck of the woods, Minister?" came Madam Rosmerta's voice.

Harry saw the lower part of Fudge's thick body twist in his chair as though he were checking for eavesdroppers. Then he said in a quiet voice, "What else, m'dear, but Sirius Black? I daresay you heard what happened up at the school at Halloween?"

"I did hear a rumor," admitted Madam Rosmerta.

"Did you tell the whole pub, Hagrid?" said Professor McGonagall exasperatedly.

"Do you think Black's still in the area, Minister?" whispered Madam Rosmerta.

"I'm sure of it," said Fudge shortly.

"You know that the dementors have searched my pub twice?" said Madam Rosmerta, a slight edge to her voice. "Scared all my customers away. . . . It's very bad for business, Minister."

"Rosmerta, m'dear, I don't like them any more than you do," said Fudge uncomfortably. "Necessary precaution . . . unfortunate, but there you are. . . . I've just met some of them. They're in a fury against Dumbledore — he won't let them inside the castle grounds."

"I should think not," said Professor McGonagall sharply. "How are we supposed to teach with those horrors floating around?"

“Hear, hear!” squeaked tiny Professor Flitwick, whose feet were dangling a foot from the ground.

“All the same,” demurred Fudge, “they are here to protect you all from something much worse. . . . We all know what Black’s capable of. . . .”

“Do you know, I still have trouble believing it,” said Madam Rosmerta thoughtfully. “Of all the people to go over to the Dark Side, Sirius Black was the last I’d have thought. . . . I mean, I remember him when he was a boy at Hogwarts. If you’d told me then what he was going to become, I’d have said you’d had too much mead.”

“You don’t know the half of it, Rosmerta,” said Fudge gruffly. “The worst he did isn’t widely known.”

“The worst?” said Madam Rosmerta, her voice alive with curiosity. “Worse than murdering all those poor people, you mean?”

“I certainly do,” said Fudge.

“I can’t believe that. What could possibly be worse?”

“You say you remember him at Hogwarts, Rosmerta,” murmured Professor McGonagall. “Do you remember who his best friend was?”

“Naturally,” said Madam Rosmerta, with a small laugh. “Never saw one without the other, did you? The number of times I had them in here — ooh, they used to make me laugh. Quite the double act, Sirius Black and James Potter!”

Harry dropped his tankard with a loud clunk. Ron kicked him.

“Precisely,” said Professor McGonagall. “Black and Potter. Ringleaders of their little gang. Both very bright, of course — exceptionally bright, in fact — but I don’t think we’ve ever had such

a pair of troublemakers —”

“I dunno,” chuckled Hagrid. “Fred and George Weasley could give ‘em a run fer their money.”

“You’d have thought Black and Potter were brothers!” chimed in Professor Flitwick. “Inseparable!”

“Of course they were,” said Fudge. “Potter trusted Black beyond all his other friends. Nothing changed when they left school. Black was best man when James married Lily. Then they named him godfather to Harry. Harry has no idea, of course. You can imagine how the idea would torment him.”

“Because Black turned out to be in league with You-Know-Who?” whispered Madam Rosmerta.

“Worse even than that, m’ dear. . . .” Fudge dropped his voice and proceeded in a sort of low rumble. “Not many people are aware that the Potters knew You-Know-Who was after them. Dumbledore, who was of course working tirelessly against You-Know-Who, had a number of useful spies. One of them tipped him off, and he alerted James and Lily at once. He advised them to go into hiding. Well, of course, You-Know-Who wasn’t an easy person to hide from. Dumbledore told them that their best chance was the Fidelius Charm.”

“How does that work?” said Madam Rosmerta, breathless with interest. Professor Flitwick cleared his throat.

“An immensely complex spell,” he said squeakily, “involving the magical concealment of a secret inside a single, living soul. The information is hidden inside the chosen person, or Secret-Keeper, and is henceforth impossible to find — unless, of course, the Secret-

Keeper chooses to divulge it. As long as the Secret-Keeper refused to speak, You-Know-Who could search the village where Lily and James were staying for years and never find them, not even if he had his nose pressed against their sitting-room window!”

“So Black was the Potters’ Secret-Keeper?” whispered Madam Rosmerta.

“Naturally,” said Professor McGonagall. “James Potter told Dumbledore that Black would die rather than tell where they were, that Black was planning to go into hiding himself . . . and yet, Dumbledore remained worried. I remember him offering to be the Potters’ Secret-Keeper himself.”

“He suspected Black?” gasped Madam Rosmerta.

“He was sure that somebody close to the Potters had been keeping You-Know-Who informed of their movements,” said Professor McGonagall darkly. “Indeed, he had suspected for some time that someone on our side had turned traitor and was passing a lot of information to You-Know-Who.”

“But James Potter insisted on using Black?”

“He did,” said Fudge heavily. “And then, barely a week after the Fidelius Charm had been performed —”

“Black betrayed them?” breathed Madam Rosmerta.

“He did indeed. Black was tired of his double-agent role, he was ready to declare his support openly for You-Know-Who, and he seems to have planned this for the moment of the Potters’ death. But, as we all know, You-Know-Who met his downfall in little Harry Potter. Powers gone, horribly weakened, he fled. And this left Black in a very nasty position indeed. His master had fallen at the very

moment when he, Black, had shown his true colors as a traitor. He had no choice but to run for it —”

“Filthy, stinkin’ turncoat!” Hagrid said, so loudly that half the bar went quiet.

“Shh!” said Professor McGonagall.

“I met him!” growled Hagrid. “I musta bin the last ter see him before he killed all them people! It was me what rescued Harry from Lily an’ James’s house after they was killed! Jus’ got him outta the ruins, poor little thing, with a great slash across his forehead, an’ his parents dead. . . . an’ Sirius Black turns up, on that flyin’ motorbike he used ter ride. Never occurred ter me what he was doin’ there. I didn’ know he’d bin Lily an’ James’s Secret-Keeper. Thought he’d jus’ heard the news o’ You-Know-Who’s attack an’ come ter see what he could do. White an’ shakin’, he was. An’ yeh know what I did? I COMFORTED THE MURDERIN’ TRAITOR!” Hagrid roared.

“Hagrid, please!” said Professor McGonagall. “Keep your voice down!”

“How was I ter know he wasn’ upset abou’ Lily an’ James? It was You-Know-Who he cared abou’! An’ then he says, ‘Give Harry ter me, Hagrid, I’m his godfather, I’ll look after him —’ Ha! But I’d had me orders from Dumbledore, an’ I told Black no, Dumbledore said Harry was ter go ter his aunt an’ uncle’s. Black argued, but in the end he gave in. Told me ter take his motorbike ter get Harry there. ‘I won’t need it anymore,’ he says.

“I shoulda known there was somethin’ fishy goin’ on then. He loved that motorbike, what was he givin’ it ter me for? Why wouldn’ he need it anymore? Fact was, it was too easy ter trace. Dumbledore

knew he'd bin the Potters' Secret-Keeper. Black knew he was goin' ter have ter run fer it that night, knew it was a matter o' hours before the Ministry was after him.

"But what if I'd given Harry to him, eh? I bet he'd've pitched him off the bike halfway out ter sea. His bes' friends' son! But when a wizard goes over ter the Dark Side, there's nothin' and no one that matters to 'em anymore. . . ."

A long silence followed Hagrid's story. Then Madam Rosmerta said with some satisfaction, "But he didn't manage to disappear, did he? The Ministry of Magic caught up with him next day!"

"Alas, if only we had," said Fudge bitterly. "It was not we who found him. It was little Peter Pettigrew — another of the Potters' friends. Maddened by grief, no doubt, and knowing that Black had been the Potters' Secret-Keeper, he went after Black himself."

"Pettigrew . . . that fat little boy who was always tagging around after them at Hogwarts?" said Madam Rosmerta.

"Hero-worshipped Black and Potter," said Professor McGonagall. "Never quite in their league, talent-wise. I was often rather sharp with him. You can imagine how I — how I regret that now. . . ." She sounded as though she had a sudden head cold.

"There, now, Minerva," said Fudge kindly, "Pettigrew died a hero's death. Eyewitnesses — Muggles, of course, we wiped their memories later — told us how Pettigrew cornered Black. They say he was sobbing, 'Lily and James, Sirius! How could you?' And then he went for his wand. Well, of course, Black was quicker. Blew Pettigrew to smithereens. . . ."

Professor McGonagall blew her nose and said thickly, "Stupid

boy . . . foolish boy . . . he was always hopeless at dueling . . . should have left it to the Ministry. . . .”

“I tell yeh, if I’d got ter Black before little Pettigrew did, I wouldn’t’ve messed around with wands — I’d’ve ripped him limb — from — limb,” Hagrid growled.

“You don’t know what you’re talking about, Hagrid,” said Fudge sharply. “Nobody but trained Hit Wizards from the Magical Law Enforcement Squad would have stood a chance against Black once he was cornered. I was Junior Minister in the Department of Magical Catastrophes at the time, and I was one of the first on the scene after Black murdered all those people. I — I will never forget it. I still dream about it sometimes. A crater in the middle of the street, so deep it had cracked the sewer below. Bodies everywhere. Muggles screaming. And Black standing there laughing, with what was left of Pettigrew in front of him . . . a heap of bloodstained robes and a few — a few fragments —”

Fudge’s voice stopped abruptly. There was the sound of five noses being blown.

“Well, there you have it, Rosmerta,” said Fudge thickly. “Black was taken away by twenty members of the Magical Law Enforcement Squad and Pettigrew received the Order of Merlin, First Class, which I think was some comfort to his poor mother. Black’s been in Azkaban ever since.”

Madam Rosmerta let out a long sigh.

“Is it true he’s mad, Minister?”

“I wish I could say that he was,” said Fudge slowly. “I certainly believe his master’s defeat unhinged him for a while. The murder of

Pettigrew and all those Muggles was the action of a cornered and desperate man — cruel . . . pointless. Yet I met Black on my last inspection of Azkaban. You know, most of the prisoners in there sit muttering to themselves in the dark; there's no sense in them . . . but I was shocked at how *normal* Black seemed. He spoke quite rationally to me. It was unnerving. You'd have thought he was merely bored — asked if I'd finished with my newspaper, cool as you please, said he missed doing the crossword. Yes, I was astounded at how little effect the dementors seemed to be having on him — and he was one of the most heavily guarded in the place, you know. Dementors outside his door day and night.”

“But what do you think he's broken out to do?” said Madam Rosmerta. “Good gracious, Minister, he isn't trying to rejoin You-Know-Who, is he?”

“I daresay that is his — er — eventual plan,” said Fudge evasively. “But we hope to catch Black long before that. I must say, You-Know-Who alone and friendless is one thing . . . but give him back his most devoted servant, and I shudder to think how quickly he'll rise again . . .”

There was a small chink of glass on wood. Someone had set down their glass.

“You know, Cornelius, if you're dining with the headmaster, we'd better head back up to the castle,” said Professor McGonagall.

One by one, the pairs of feet in front of Harry took the weight of their owners once more; hems of cloaks swung into sight, and Madam Rosemerta's glittering heels disappeared behind the bar. The door of the Three Broomsticks opened again, there was another flurry of

snow, and the teachers had disappeared.

“Harry?”

Ron’s and Hermione’s faces appeared under the table. They were both staring at him, lost for words.

Die Plunderaar se Kaart

Madame Pomfrey dring daarop aan dat Harry vir die res van die naweek in die siekeboeg bly. Hy stry of kla nie, maar laat haar nie toe om die verpletterde reste van sy Nimbus Tweeduisend weg te gooi nie. Hy weet dat hy simpel is, weet dat die Nimbus nie herstel kan word nie, maar Harry kan dit nie help nie; dit voel asof hy een van sy beste vriende verloor het.

Hy het 'n stroom besoekers wat almal van plan is om hom op te beur. Hagrid stuur vir hom 'n bos oorwurmbloem wat soos geel kopkole lyk, en 'n blorsende Ginny Weasley daag op met 'n "word-gou-gesond"-kaartjie wat sy self gemaak het en wat skril aan die sing gaan tensy Harry dit onder sy bak vrugte vasdruk. Die Griffindorspan besoek hom weer op Sondagoggend, hierdie keer vergesel van Wood wat vir Harry in 'n dooie, hol stem sê dat hy hom nie in die minste blameer nie. Ron en Hermien verlaat Harry se bed net snags. Tog kan niks wat iemand sê of doen vir Harry laat beter voel nie, want hulle weet net die helfte van wat hom pla.

Hy het vir niemand van die Grim gesê nie, nie eens vir Ron en Hermien nie, want hy weet dat Ron paniekbevange sal raak en dat Hermien 'n smalende aanmerking sal maak. Die feit bly egter staan dat dit nou al twee keer verskyn het, en dat hy met elke verskyning naelskraap aan die dood ontkom het; die eerste keer is hy amper deur die Ridderbus omgery, tydens die tweede het hy twintig meter ver van sy besemstok afgeval. Gaan die Grim hom bly besoek tot hy inderdaad dood is? Sal hy vir die res van sy lewe oor sy skouer moet kyk of die gedierte daar is?

Dan is daar die Dementors. Harry voel siek en vernederd elke keer dat hy aan hulle dink. Almal sê dat die Dementors aaklig is, maar niemand anders stort ineen elke keer dat hulle naby een kom nie . . . niemand anders hoor eggo's in hul koppe van hul sterwende ouers nie.

Teen hierdie tyd weet Harry aan wie die skreeuende stem behoort. Hy het haar woorde gehoor, hoor hulle oor en oor in die nagtelike ure in die siekeboeg wanneer hy wakker lê en na die maanligstrepe teen die plafon staar. Wanneer die Dementors naby hom kom, hoor hy die laaste oomblikke van sy ma se lewe, haar pogings om hom, Harry, teen die heer Woldemort te beskerm, en Woldemort se gelag net voor hy haar vermoor.

Harry slaap rusteloos, sink weg in drome vol klam, verrottende hande en 'n verskrikte gepleit, om wakker te ruk en opnuut aan die geluid van sy ma se stem te dink.

Dit is 'n verligting om daardie Maandag terug te keer na die geraas en bedrywighede van die skool, waar hy gedwing word om aan ander goed te dink, al moet hy ook Draco Malfoy se gespot verduur. Malfoy is buite homself van vreugde oor Griffindor se nederlaag. Hy het sy verbande uiteindelik afgehaal, en vier die volle gebruik van sy arms deur nabootsings van hoe Harry van sy besem afval. Vir 'n groot deel van hul volgende Towerdrankie-les doen Malfoy Dementor-nabootsings in die kerker, tot Ron hom uiteindelik so vervies dat hy 'n yslike, glibberige krokodilhart na Malfoy gooi, hom in die gesig tref, en maak dat Snerp vyftig punte van Griffindor aftrek.

"As Snerp weer die Verdediging teen die Donker Kunste-klas waarneem, is ek siek," sê Ron toe hulle na middagete na Lupin se klas stap. "Kyk eers gou wie dit is, Hermien."

Hermien loer om die klaskamer se deur.

"Dis oukei!"

Professor Lupin is terug op sy pos. Dit lyk beslis asof hy siek was. Sy ou klee hang nog losser aan hom en daar is donker skaduwees onder sy oë; tog glimlag hy vir die klas toe hulle hul plekke inneem, en hulle ontplof net daar in 'n uitbarsting van klagtes oor Snerp se gedrag terwyl Lupin siek was.

"Dis nie regverdig nie, hy't net waargeneem, hoe kan hy vir ons huiswerk staan en gee?"

"Ons weet niks van weerwolwe af nie –"

"– twee rolle perkament!"

"Het julle vir professor Snerp gesê dat ons dit nog nie behandel het nie?" vra Lupin terwyl hy effens frons.

Die gebabbel breek van voor af los.

"Ja, maar hy't gesê ons is regtig agter –"

"– hy wou nie luister nie –"

"– twee rolle perkament!"

Professor Lupin glimlag oor die trek van verontwaardiging op elke gesig.

"Moet julle nie bekommer nie. Ek sal met professor Snerp praat. Julle hoef nie die opstel te skryf nie."

"O, nee," sê Hermien en sy lyk uiters teleurgesteld. "Ek is al klaar daarmee!"

Hulle het 'n baie lekker les. Professor Lupin het 'n glaskrat met 'n Hinkpink gebring, 'n klein gedroegie met net een been wat lyk asof dit van yl rook gemaak is, en wat tingerig en onskadelik voorkom.

"Lok reisigers na moerasse," sê professor Lupin, terwyl hulle aantekeninge maak. "Sien julle die lantern wat aan sy hand hang? Spring vooruit – mense volg die lig – dan –"

Die Hinkpink maak 'n aaklige plasgeluid teen die glas.

Toe die klok lui, maak almal hul goed bymekaar en mik vir die deur, en so ook Harry, maar –

"Net 'n oomblik, Harry," roep Lupin, "ek wil met jou praat."

Harry keer terug en sien hoe professor Lupin die Hinkpink se houers met 'n lap toegooi.

"Ek het van die wedstryd gehoor," sê Lupin terwyl hy terugdraai na sy lessenaar en sy boeke in sy tas begin pak, "en ek is jammer oor jou besemstok. Is daar enige moontlikheid dat dit herstel kan word?"

"Nee," sê Harry. "Die boom het dit in stukkies gebreek."

Lupin sug.

"Hulle het die Woelige Wilg in die jaar dat ek by Hogwarts aangekom het, geplant. Die mense het 'n speletjie gespeel wie na genoeg daaraan kan kom om aan die stam te kan raak. Op die ou end het 'n seun met die naam Davey Gudgeon amper 'n oog verloor, en ons is verbied om weer naby hom te gaan. Geen besemstok het 'n kans nie."

"Het u ook van die Dementors gehoor?" vra Harry met inspanning.

Lupin kyk vinnig na hom.

"Ja, ek het. Ek dink nie een van ons het professor Dompeldorius al ooit so kwaad gesien nie. Dis al 'n geruime tyd dat hulle rusteloos is. Woedend oor hy weier om hulle op die terrein toe te laat. . . . Ek veronderstel hulle is die rede dat jy geval het?"

"Ja," sê Harry. Hy aarsel, en toe, voor hy homself kan keer, bars die vraag wat hy net eenvoudig moet vra, uit hom. "Hoekom? Hoekom het hulle so 'n uitwerking op my? Is ek dan net –?"

"Dit het niks met swakheid te doen nie," sê professor Lupin skerp, nes of hy Harry se gedagtes gelees het. "Die Dementors tas jou erger as ander mense aan omdat daar gruwel in jou verlede is wat die ander nie het nie."

'n Wintersonstraal val oor die klaskamer en verlig Lupin se grys hare en die plooie op sy jong gesig.

"Dementors is van die walglikste kreature op aarde. Hulle hou in die donkerste, vuilste plekke, hulle verkneukel hulself in wanhoop en verrotting, hulle suig alle vrede, hoop en vreugde uit die lug om hulle. Selfs Moggels kan hul teenwoordigheid aanvoel, hoewel hulle hulle nie kan sien nie. As jy te na aan 'n Dementor kom, word alle goeie gevoelens, elke gelukkige herinnering uit jou gesuig. As hy kan, sal die Dementor lank genoeg op jou teer sodat jy net soos hy sal word – sonder siel en hoos. Jy sal met slegs die ergste ervarings van jou lewe oorbly. En die ergste wat met jou gebeur het, Harry, is genoeg om enigeen van sy besem te laat afval. Jy het niks om oor skaam te voel nie."

"Wanneer hulle naby my kom –" Harry staar na Lupin se lessenaar en sy keel trek toe, "dan hoor ek hoe Woldemort my ma doodmaak."

Lupin maak 'n skielike beweging met sy arm asof hy vir Harry aan die skouer wil gryp, maar homself bedink. Daar is 'n oomblik se stilte; dan –

"Hoekom moes hulle na die wedstryd kom?" sê Harry bitter.

"Hulle is honger," sê Lupin koeltjies, terwyl hy sy tas toeklap. "Dompeldorius wil hulle nie in die skool toelaat nie, dus het hul voorraad van menslike prooi opgedroog . . . Ek dink hulle kon die reuseskare om die Kwiddiekveld nie weerstaan nie. Al daardie opgewondenheid . . . emosie wat hoog loop . . . dit was hul idee van 'n fees."

"Azkaban moet verskriklik wees," mompel Harry. Lupin knik grinnig.

"Die vesting is geleë op 'n klein eilandjie, ver weg in die see, maar hulle het nie mure en water nodig om die gevangenes binne te hou nie, nie wanneer hulle almal binne hul eie koppe vasgevang is en nie tot een enkele vrolike gedagte in staat is nie. Die meeste van hulle is binne 'n paar weke mal."

"Maar Sirius Swardt het ontsnap," sê Harry stadig. "Hy het weggekom . . ."

Lupin se boeketas glip van die lessenaar af; hy moet vinnig buk om dit te vang.

"Ja," sê hy, terwyl hy regop kom. "Swardt moet 'n manier gevind het om hulle te beveg. Ek sou nie kon dink dat dit moontlik is nie . . . Dementors is veronderstel om 'n towenaar van al sy magte te ontnem as hy lank genoeg tussen hulle bly . . ."

"U het daardie Dementor op die trein afgeweier," sê Harry skielik.

"Daar is sekere – maniere om jouself teen hulle te verdedig," sê Lupin, "maar daar was net een Dementor op die trein. Hoe meer daar is, hoe moeiliker word dit om jou teen te sit."

"Watter maniere?" sê Harry dadelik. "Kan u dit vir my leer?"

"Ek wil nie voorgee dat ek 'n ekspert Dementor-bevegter is nie, Harry – intendeel . . ."

"Maar as die Dementors weer na 'n Kwiddiekwedstryd kom, dan wil ek weet hoe om teen hulle te veg –"

Lupin kyk na Harry se vasberade gesig, aarsel, en sê dan, "Wel . . . goed. Ek sal jou probeer help. Ek is egter bevrees dat dit tot volgende kwartaal sal moet wag. Ek het baie om te doen voor die vakansie. Ek het 'n uiters ongerieflike tyd gekies om siek te word."

Die belofte van Anti-Dementorlesse deur Lupin, die gedagte dat hy nooit weer sy ma se dood sal hoef te hoor nie, en die feit dat Raweklou vir Hoesenproes tydens hul Kwiddiekwedstryd aan die einde van November verpletter het, laat Harry sommer baie beter voel. Griffindor het nog steeds

kan, hoewel hulle nie kan bekostig om nog 'n wedstryd te verloor nie. Wood is weer vervul met maniese energie en laat die span net so hard mus tevore oefen in die koue waas van reën wat nog tot in Desember val. Harry sien nie 'n spoor van 'n Dementor op die kasteelterrein nie. Dit lyk of Dompeldorius se woede hulle op hul poste by die ingange hou.

Twee weke voor die einde van die kwartaal word die hemel onverwags 'n verblindende, opaalagtige wit en een oggend lê die modderige terrein ontbloot voor hulle, bedek met glinsterende ryp. Binne-in die kasteel hang die geroesemoes van Kersfees in die lug. Professor Flickerpitt, die towerspreuk-onderwyser, het reeds sy klaskamer versier met glimmende liggies wat in werklikheid egte, fladderende feetjies is. Die studente is almal besig om met groot entoesiasme oor hul vakansieplanne te praat. Sowel Ron as Hermien het besluit om by Hogwarts te bly, en hoewel Ron sê dis omdat hy nie twee weke in Percy se geselskap sal uithou nie, en Hermien volhou dat sy die biblioteek moet gebruik, weet Harry van beter; hulle wil hom geselskap hou, en hy is baie dankbaar daarvoor.

Almal se groot vreugde, behalwe Harry s'n, gaan daar tydens die heel laaste naweek van die kwartaal nog 'n uitstappie na Hogsmeade toe wees.

"Ons kan al ons Kersinkopies daar doen!" sê Hermien. "My ma en pa sal sommer baie van Honeydukes se Tandevlosmente hou!"

Harry het berus in die feit dat hy weer die enigste derdejaar gaan wees wat agterbly. Hy het 'n eksemplaar van *Walter Besemstok* by Wood geleen en het besluit dat hy op dié dag oor die verskillende fabrikate sal oplees. Op die oomblik ry hy op een van die skool se besems wanneer hulle oefen, 'n stokou Shooting Star, wat baie stadig en rukkerig is; hy het beslis 'n nuwe besem van sy eie nodig.

Op die Saterdagoggend van die uitstappie na Hogsmeade groet Harry vir Ron en Hermien wat in mantels en serpe gewikkel is, en stap toe alreën na die marmertrappe en terug na die Griffindortoring. Dit het buite die vensters begin sneeu en die kasteel is stil en kalm.

"Psst – Harry!"

Hy draai om, reeds halfpad met die gang op die derde vloer, en sien vir Fred en George wat van agter die standbeeld van 'n eenoog-boggelrugbyspeler na hom loer.

"Wat maak julle?" sê Harry nuuskierig. "Hoekom is julle nie Hogsmeade toe nie?"

"Ons het besluit om jou 'n bietjie op te beur voor ons gaan," sê Fred en knipoog geheimsinnig. "Kom gou hierheen . . ."

Hy beduie na 'n leë klaskamer net links van die eenoogstandbeeld. Harry volg Fred en George na binne. George maak die deur saggies toe, draai om en kyk stralend na Harry.

"Vroeë Kersgeskenk vir jou, Harry," sê hy.

Met 'n swierige gebaar haal Fred iets uit sy mantel en sit dit op een van die lessenaars neer. Dit is 'n groot, vierkantige, baie verweerde stuk perkament waarop niks geskryf is nie. Harry, wat vermoed dat dit een van Fred en George se grappe is, staar bloot daarna.

"Wat's dit nogal veronderstel om te wees?"

"Dit, Harry, is die sleutel tot ons sukses," sê George en tik-tik liefderik op die perkament.

"Dit is nie sonder diepe smart dat ons dit vir jou gee nie," sê Fred, "maar ons het laas nag besluit dat jy dit nodiger het as ons."

"Wat meer is, ons ken dit uit ons koppe," sê George. "Ons bemaak dit aan jou. Ons het dit regtig nie meer nodig nie."

"En wat moet ek nogal met 'n stuk ou perkament maak?" sê Harry.

"'n Stuk ou perkament!" sê Fred terwyl hy sy oë met 'n grynslag sluit, nes of Harry hom ten diepste gekrenk het. "Verduidelik, George."

"Wel . . . toe ons in ons eerste jaar was, Harry – jonk, sorgeloos en onskuldig –"

Harry snork; hy twyfel of Fred en George ooit onskuldig was.

"– wel, baie meer onskuldig as wat ons nou is – toe het ons in die moeilikheid beland by Fillis."

"Ons het 'n Misbom in die gang laat ontplof en om die een of ander rede het dit hom ontstel –"

"Toe sleep hy ons na sy kantoor en dreig ons met die gewone –"

"– detensie –"

"– die uithaal van ons ingewande –"

"– en . . . ons kon nie anders as om 'n laai in een van sy liasseerkabinette te sien waarop *Gekonfiskeer en Hoogs Gevaarlik* staan nie."

"Moenie vir my sê –" sê Harry wat begin glimlag het.

"Wel, wat sou jy gedoen het?" sê Fred. "George het sy aandag afgetrek deur nog 'n Misbom te gooi en ek het die laai oopgeruk en – dit gegryp."

"Dis nie so erg soos dit klink nie, weet jy," sê George. "Ons reken Fillis het nooit uitgevind hoe dit werk nie. Hy het waarskynlik vermoed wat dit is, anders sou hy dit nie afgevat het nie."

"En julle weet hoe dit werk?"

"O ja," sê Fred en hy grimlag. "Hierdie klein pragstuk het vir ons meer geleer as al die onderwysers in die skool tesame."

"Julle hou my vir die gek," sê Harry terwyl hy na die verrinneweerde stuk perkament kyk.

"O, nè?" sê George.

Hy haal sy towerstaf uit, tik liggies op die perkament en sê, "Ek belowe plegtig om moles te maak."

Onmiddellik begin dun lyntjies ink soos 'n spinnerak uitsprei vanaf die plek wat deur George se towerstaf aangeraak is. Hulle sluit by mekaar aan, loop kruls en dwars, en waaier uit tot in elke hoek van die perka-

ment; toe verskyn woorde aan die bokant, groot, krullerige, groen woorde wat sê:

*Menere Maantjie, Wurmstert, Kussingvoet en Gaffel
Leweransiers van Hulpmiddels aan Towerrakkers
bied met trots aan:
DIE PLUNDERAAR SE KAART*

Dit is 'n kaart waarop elke besonderheid van die Hogwarts-kasteel en terrein aangebring is. Wat werklik merkwaardig is, is die klein inkkolletjies wat daarop rondbeweeg; elkeen is gemerk met 'n naam in miniatuurskrif. Verstom buig Harry daaroor. 'n Gemerkte kolletjie in die hoek links bo wys dat professor Dompeldorius op en af in sy studeerkamer loop; die opsigter se kat, mev. Norris, sluip op die tweede vloer rond, en Nurks die poltergeist is op die oomblik besig om in die trofeekamer op en af te bons. Toe Harry se oë langs die bekende gange af dwaal, sien hy iets anders.

Hierdie kaart wys 'n stel tunnels waarin hy nog nooit was nie, en baie van hulle lyk asof hulle –

“Reguit Hogsmeade toe, sien,” sê Fred en trek een van hulle met sy vinger na. “Daar is altesame sewe. Fillis weet van hierdie vier –” hy wys hulle uit, “– maar ons is seker dat ons die enigstes is wat van hierdies weet. Vergeet van die een agter die spieël op die vierde vloer. Ons het dit tot laas winter gebruik, maar dit het ingeval. En ons dink niemand het hierdie een al ooit gebruik nie, want die Woelige Wilg is reg voor die ingang geplant. Maar hierdie een gaan reguit na Honeydukes se kelder. Ons het dit al honderde kere gebruik. En soos jy seker gesien het, die ingang is net buite hierdie kamer, deur daardie ou eenoogheks se boggel.”

“Maantjie, Wurmstert, Kussingvoet en Gaffel,” sug George en tik-tik teen die opskrif bo-aan die kaart. “Ons is diep in die skuld by hulle.”

“Edele manne, wat hulself onvermoeid afgesloof het om 'n nuwe geslag kwajongens te help,” sê Fred sedig.

“Reg,” sê George flink, “moenie vergeet om dit uit te vee as jy klaar is nie –”

“– anders kan enigeen dit lees,” waarsku Fred.

“Tik net weer daarteen en sê, ‘Moles is gemaak!’ dan word dit weer leeg.”

“Dus, Harry my vriend,” sê Fred en hy klink verbasend baie soos Percy, “sorg dat jy jouself gedra.”

“Sien jou in Honeydukes,” sê George met 'n knipoog.

Toe hulle by die vertrek uitstap, glimlag albei van hulle op 'n selftevrede soort manier.

Harry staan hom aan die wonderkaart en vergaap. Hy sien hoe die klein inkkol wat mev. Norris is, links draai en gaan staan om aan iets op die vloer te ruik. As Fillis regtig nie weet nie . . . hoef hy glad nie verby die Dementors te gaan nie . . .

Terwyl hy, vervul met opwinding, daar staan, skiet iets wat Harry mnr. Weasley eenkeer hoor sê het hom skielik te binne.

Moet nooit iets vertrou wat kan dink as jy nie kan sien waar sy brein is nie.

Hierdie kaart is een van daardie gevaarlike towervoorwerpe waarteen mnr. Weasley hulle gewaarsku het . . . *Hulpmiddels aan Towerrakkers* . . .

maar, so reken Harry, hy wil dit tog net gebruik om mee Hogsmeade toe te gaan, dis nie of hy iets wil steel of iemand wil aanval nie . . . en Fred en George het dit vir jare gebruik sonder dat iets vreesliks gebeur het . . .

Harry trek die geheime tunnel na Honeydukes met sy vinger na.

Toe, skielik, asof op 'n bevel, rol hy die kaart op, steek dit binne-in sy kleed en haas hom na die klaskamer se deur. Hy maak dit op 'n skrefie oop. Daar is niemand daar buite nie. Baie versigtig glip hy by die kamer uit en agterom die eenoogheks se standbeeld.

Wat moet hy doen? Hy haal die kaart uit en sien tot sy verbasing dat 'n nuwe inksfiguurtjie gemerk "Harry Potter" daarop verskyn het. Hierdie figuurtjie staan op die presiese plek waar die ware Harry staan, so ongeveer halfpad af met die gang op die derde verdieping. Harry hou dit sorgvuldig dop. Dit lyk of sy klein inksself met 'n piepklein towerstaffie teen die heks tik. Harry haal sy regte towerstaf gou-gou uit en tik teen die standbeeld. Niks gebeur nie. Hy kyk weer na die kaart. 'n Klein spraakborrel het reg langs die figuurtjie verskyn. Die woord wat daarin staan, is "*Dissendium*".

"Dissendium!" fluister Harry en tik weer teen die klipheks.

Die standbeeld se boggel gaan dadelik wyd genoeg oop om 'n redelike maer persoon deur te laat. Harry loer vinnig op en af in die gang, steek die kaart weer weg, hys homself kop eerste deur die gat en stoot homself vorentoe.

Hy gly 'n redelike ver ent af na onder met iets wat soos 'n klipglybaan voel, en land op die koue, klam grond. Hy staan op en kyk om hom rond. Dit is pikdonker. Hy hou sy towerstaf op, brom, "Lumos!" en sien dat hy in 'n baie nou, lae tunnel onder die grond is. Hy lig die kaart, tik daarteen met die punt van sy towerstaf en mompel, "Moles is gemaak!" Die kaart word dadelik leeg. Hy vou dit versigtig op, versteek dit in sy kleed en toe, met 'n hart wat vinnig klop, opgewonde en onseker tesame, stap hy aan.

Die tunnel kronkel en slinger, meer soos die nes van 'n enorme konyn as enigiets anders. Harry loop haastig daarlangs met sy towerstaf uitgestrek voor hom, en struikel so nou en dan oor die ongelyk vloer.

Dit neem eene, maar die gedagte aan Honeydukes hou Harry aan die gang. Na wat soos 'n uur voel, begin die tunnel styg. Harry stap vinniger, liggend, sy gesig is warm en sy voete is baie koud.

Tien minute later kom hy aan die voet van 'n paar verweerde kliptrappe wat bo hom in die niet verdwyn. Harry doen sy bes om nie te raas nie en begin klim. 'n Honderd treetjies, tweehonderd treetjies, hy raak deurmeekaar soos hy klim, hou sy voete dop . . . toe, sonder waarskuwing, tref sy kop iets hards.

Dit moet 'n valdeur wees. Harry staan en luister terwyl hy die bokant van sy kop vryf. Hy kan geen geluide bo hom hoor nie. Hy stoot die valdeur stadig oop en loer oor die kant.

Hy is in 'n kelder wat vol houtkrate en kartonne is. Harry klim vinnig deur die luik en maak die valdeur toe – dit smelt so perfek ineen met die stowwerige vloer dat dit onmoontlik is om te sien. Harry kruip stadig na 'n houttrap wat boontoe lei. Nou kan hy definitief stemme hoor, om nie te praat van die getinkel van 'n klokke en die geluid van 'n deur wat oop- en toegaan nie.

Hy wonder nog wat hom te doen staan toe hy 'n deur wat baie nader aan hom is skielik hoor oopgaan; iemand is besig om ondertoe te kom.

“En bring nog 'n doos Jellieslakke, skat, hulle's amper uitverkoop –” se 'n vroustem.

'n Paar voete kom met die trappe af. Harry spring agter 'n tamaai krat in en wag dat die voetstappe verbygaan. Hy hoor hoe die man die bokse teen die oorkantste muur rondstoot. Hy kry dalk nie weer 'n kans nie –

Harry glip stilletjies uit van agter sy wegkruipplek en klim met die trappe op; toe hy terugkyk, sien hy 'n enorme rug en 'n blink pankop in 'n karton verdwyn. Toe Harry by die deur aan die bopunt van die trappe kom, glip hy vinnig daardeur en bevind homself agter die toonbank in Honeydukes – hy koes weg, kruip sywaarts en kom dan orent.

Honeydukes is so vol Hogwarts-studente dat niemand twee keer na Harry kyk nie. Hy druk deur hulle, kyk om hom, en moet 'n lagbui onderdruk by die gedagte aan die uitdrukking wat oor Dudley se varkgesig sal sprei as hy kon sien waar Harry nou is.

Daar is rakke op rakke vol lekkergoed wat ongelooflik smaaklik lyk. Romerige hompe nougat, glinsterende pienk blokke klapperys, vet, heuningkleurige toffies, honderde soorte sjokolade in netjiese rye; daar is 'n groot vaatjie vol Allegeurtjebone, en nog een vol Sissende Frisballe, die suursuikerballe waarvan Ron gepraat het en wat 'n mens laat opstyg; teen nog 'n muur is “Speciale-Effekte”-lekkergoed: Boebels se Beste Borrelgom (wat 'n kamer vol helderblou borrels maak wat vir dae weier om te bars), die vreemde, splinterige Tandevlosmente, klein swart Peperonnutte (“blaas vuur oor jou vriende!”), Ysmulse (“hoor hoe jou tande piep en kraak!”), pepermentroompies in die vorm van skurwepaddas (“hop rea-

listies in jou maag rond!"), delikate suikerveerpenne en bonbons wat ontplof.

Harry beur deur 'n groep sesdejaars en sien 'n bord wat in die verste hoek van die winkel hang ("Ongewone Smake"). Ron en Hermien staan daaronder en bekyk 'n skinkbord vol bloedgegeurde stokkielekkers. Harry sluip tot agter hulle.

"Sies, nee, Harry sal nie daarvan wil hê nie, dis vir vampiere sou ek sê," sê Hermien.

"Wat hiervan?" sê Ron en hou 'n fles vol Kakkerlakklonte onder Hermien se neus.

"Beslis nie," sê Harry.

Ron laat die fles amper val.

"Harry!" gil Hermien. "Wat maak jy hier? Hoe – hoe het jy dit reggekry –?"

"Sjoe!" sê Ron en hy lyk uiters beïndruk. "Het jy geleer om te Appareer?"

"Natuurlik het ek nie," sê Harry. Hy laat sak sy stem sodat nie een van die sesdejaars hom moet hoor nie, en vertel vir hulle alles oor die Plunderaar se Kaart.

"Hoekom het Fred en George dit nooit vir my gegee nie!" sê Ron verontwaardig. "Ek's dan hul broer!"

"Maar Harry gaan dit nie hou nie!" sê Hermien, asof dit 'n heeltemal belaglike idee is. "Hy gaan dit by professor McGonagall inhandig, of hoe, Harry?"

"Nee, ek gaan nie!" sê Harry.

"Is jy mal?" sê Ron en rol sy oë vir Hermien. "Iets wat so goed is inhandig?"

"As ek dit inhandig, sal ek moet sê waar ek dit gekry het! Fillis sal weet dat Fred en George dit gevat het!"

"Maar wat van Sirius Swardt?" sis Hermien. "Hy het dalk een van die tunnels op daardie kaart gebruik om in die kasteel te kom, nê! Die onderwysers sal moet weet!"

"Hy kan nie deur een van die tunnels inkom nie," sê Harry vinnig. "Daar is sewe geheime tunnels op die kaart, oukei? Fred en George reken Fillis weet reeds van vier van hulle. En die ander drie – een van hulle het ingeval, dus kan niemand daardeur gaan nie. Die Woelige Wilg is oor een se ingang geplant, so jy kan nie uitkom nie. En die een waardeur ek gekom het – wel – dis regtig moeilik om die ingang daar in die kelder raak te sien – tensy hy weet waar dit is –"

Harry aarsel. Wat as Swardt van die tunnel weet? Ron maak egter sy keel veelbetekenend skoon en wys na 'n nota wat aan die binnekant van die lekkergoedwinkel se deur geplak is.

Kliënte word daaraan herinner dat, tot met verdere kennisgewing, Dementors die strate van Hogsmeade elke aand na sonsondergang gaan patroleer. Hierdie maatreël is ingestel ter wille van die veiligheid van Hogsmeade se inwoners en sal net met die inhegtenisname van Sirius Swardt opgehef word. Dit is dus raadsaam dat alle inkopies voor sonsondergang voltooi word.

n Geseënde Kersfees!

“Sien!” sê Ron saggies. “Ek sal graag vir Swardt hier by Honeydukes wil sien inbreek met Dementors wat oor die hele dorp rondswerm. In elk geval, Hermien, die eienaars van Honeydukes sal mos hoor as iemand inbreek, of hoe? Hulle woon reg bo die winkel!”

“Ja, maar – maar –” Dit lyk of Hermien hard probeer om fout te vind. “Kyk, Harry behoort nog steeds nie na Hogsmeade te kom nie, hy’t nie ’n getekende vorm nie! As iemand moet uitvind, sal hy diep in die moeilikheid wees! En dis nog nie aand nie – wat as Sirius Swardt vandag opdaag? Nou?”

“Hy sal omtrent sukkel om vir Harry in hierdie weer te sien,” sê Ron en knik deur die vensters na die digte, warrelende sneeu. “Komaan, Hermien, dit is Kersfees, Harry verdien ’n wegkomkans.”

Hermien byt op haar lip en lyk besonder bekommerd.

“Gaan jy my aangee?” vra Harry grinnikend vir haar.

“Ag – natuurlik nie – maar regtig, Harry –”

“Het jy die Frisballe gesien, Harry?” sê Ron terwyl hy hom wegsleep en na die vaatjie lei. “En die Jellieslakke! En die Suurstokkies? Fred het vir my so een gegee toe ek sewe was – dit het ’n gat dwarsdeur my tong gebrand! Ek onthou nog hoe my ma hom met haar besemstok geslaan het.” Ron kyk peinsend na die doos vol Suurstokkies. “Dink jy Fred sal daarvoor val as ek vir hom ’n stuk van ’n Kakkerlakkklont gee en sê dat dit grondboontjies is?”

Toe Ron en Hermien vir al hul lekkers betaal het, verlaat hulle Honeydukes en loop die sneeustorm daar buite tegemoet.

Hogsmeade lyk soos ’n Kerskaart; die klein rietdakhuisies en -winkels is bedek met ’n laag vars sneeu; daar is hulskranse teen die deure en stringe betowerde kerse hang in die bome.

Harry bewe; anders as die ander twee het hy nie sy mantel nie. Hulle stap op in die straat met hul koppe gebuig teen die wind, terwyl Ron en Hermien deur hul serpe skreeu.

“Dis die Poskantoor –”

“Zonko is daar bo –”

“Ons kan na die Kermende Krot gaan –”

“Luister hier,” sê Ron en hy klappertand, “wat van ’n beker Botterbier in die Drie Besemstokke?”

Harry is meer as gewillig; die wind is snerpend en sy hande is ysig koud, dus kruis hulle die straat en 'n paar minute later gaan hulle die kleinerige herberg binne.

Dit is ontsettend besig, warm en vol rook. 'n Vrou met 'n vol posuur en 'n mooi gesig bedien 'n klomp raserige towenaars voor by die kroeg.

"Dit is Madame Rosmerta," sê Ron. "Ek sal die drankies kry, oukei?" voeg hy by terwyl hy effens rooi word.

Harry en Hermien gaan na die agterkant van die vertrek na 'n leë tafeltjie tussen die venster en 'n versierde Kersboom wat langs die kaggel staan. Vyf minute later kom Ron terug met drie skuimende drinkkanne vol warm Botterbier.

"Geseënde Kersfees!" sê hy tevrede, terwyl hy sy drinkkan lig.

Harry vat 'n groot sluk. Dit is die lekkerste drankie wat hy nog ooit geproe het en dis of dit elke stukkie van hom van binne af warm maak.

'n Skielike windjie krap sy hare deurmekaar. Die deur van die Drie Besemstokke het weer oopgegaan. Harry loer oor die rand van sy drinkkan en stik.

Professors McGonagall en Flickerpitt kom die kroeg binne in 'n warreling van sneeuvlokkies, met Hagrid kort op hul hakke. Hy is diep in gesprek met 'n gesette man in 'n lemmetjiegroen hardebolkeil en 'n strepiesmantel: Cornelius Broddelwerk, Minister vir Towerkuns.

Onmiddellik plaas Ron en Hermien hul hande op Harry se kop en dwing hom van sy stoel af onder die tafel in. Druppelend van die Botterbier koes Harry weg, terwyl hy sy leë drinkkan vashou en kyk hoe die onderwysers en Broddelwerk se voete na die kroeg beweeg, vassteek, en dan omdraai en reguit na hom toe loop.

Iewers bo hom fluister Hermien, "*Mobiliarbus!*"

Die Kersboom langs hul tafel styg 'n entjie op, sweef sywaarts en land met 'n sagte plofgeluid reg voor hul tafel sodat hulle daaragter verskuil is. Harry loer deur die digte onderste blare en sien hoe vier stelle stoelpote van die tafel langs hulle s'n weggetrek word, en hoor dan die onderwysers en die Minister se sugte en kreune toe hulle gaan sit.

Wat hy volgende sien, is nog 'n paar voete in blink turkoois hakke, en dan hoor hy 'n vrou se stem.

"'n Klein Viletwater –"

"Hier," sê professor McGonagall se stem.

"'n Liter warm heuningbier –"

"Dankie, Rosmerta," sê Hagrid.

"Kersiestroop en soda met ys en 'n sambreeltjie –"

"Mmm!" sê professor Flickerpitt en smak sy lippe.

"Dan is die rooikorinterum u s'n, Minister."

"Dankie, Rosmerta, my hartjie," kom Broddelwerk se stem. "Ek moet

sê, dis gaaf om jou weer te sien. Wat van 'n ietsie vir jou? Kom sit hier by ons . . .”

“Goed dankie, Minister.”

Harry kyk hoe die blink hakke wegmarsjeer en weer terugkom. Sy hart klop ongemaklik in sy keel. Hoekom het hy nie daaraan gedink dat dit ook vir die onderwysers die laaste naweek van die kwartaal is nie? Hoe lank gaan hulle daar sit? Hy het tyd nodig om by Honeydukes te kom as hy nog vannag terug skool toe wil gaan . . . Langs hom maak Hermien se been 'n senuagtige rukbeweging.

“Wat bring u hierheen, Minister?” kom Madame Rosmerta se stem.

Harry sien hoe die onderste gedeelte van Broddelwerk se dik lyf in sy stoel draai asof hy wil seker maak dat niemand afluister nie. Toe sê hy in 'n gedempte stem, “Wat anders, my hartjie, as Sirius Swardt? Ek skat jy het gehoor wat tydens Allerheiligeaand bo by die skool gebeur het?”

“Ek het gerugte gehoor,” erken Madame Rosmerta.

“Het jy vir die hele kroeg vertel, Hagrid?” sê professor McGonagall moedeloos.

“Dink u Swardt is nog in die omgewing, Minister?” fluister Madame Rosmerta.

“Ek is oortuig daarvan,” sê Broddelwerk kortaf.

“Weet u dat die Dementors my kroeg reeds twee keer deursoek het?” sê Madame Rosmerta en daar is 'n krakie in haar stem. “Al my kliënte die skrik op die lyf gejaag . . . baie sleg vir besigheid, Minister.”

“Rosmerta, my hartjie, ek hou niks meer van hulle as jy nie,” sê Broddelwerk ongemaklik. “Noodsaaklike voorsorgmaatreël . . . 'n jammerte, maar so is dit . . . ek het so pas 'n paar van hulle teëgekom. Hulle is woeënd vir Dompeldorius – hy wil hulle nie op die kasteelterrein toelaat nie.”

“Ek sou so dink,” sê professor McGonagall beslis. “Hoe op aarde moet ons klas gee as daardie gebroedsels hul neuse oral insteek?”

“Hoor, hoor!” piep die kleine professor Flickerpitt wie se voete 'n ent ho die grond hang.

“Desnieteenstaande,” kap Broddelwerk teen, “is hulle hier om julle almal teen iets veel ergers te beskerm . . . ons weet almal waartoe Swardt in staat is . . .”

“Weet u, ek vind dit nog altyd moeilik om te glo,” sê Madame Rosmerta peinsend. “Van al die mense wat na die Donker Kant oorgegaan het, is Sirius Swardt die laaste persoon van wie ek dit sou verwag . . . ek bedoel, ek onthou toe hy 'n seun hier by Hogwarts was. As julle toe vir my moes sê wat van hom sou word, sou ek gesê het julle het te veel heuningwyn gehad.”

“Jy weet nie waarvan jy praat nie, Rosmerta,” sê Broddelwerk grimmig. “Die ergste van sy dae is nie algemeen bekend nie.”

“Die ergste?” sê Madame Rosmerta en haar stem tril van nuuskierigheid. “Erger as om al daardie mense te vermoor, bedoel u?”

“Dis beslis wat ek bedoel,” sê Broddelwerk.

“Ek kan dit nie glo nie. Wat op aarde kan erger wees?”

“Jy sê jy onthou hom van toe hy by Hogwarts was, Rosmerta,” fluister professor McGonagall. “Onthou jy wie sy beste vriend was?”

“Natuurlik,” sê Madame Rosmerta met ’n klein laggie. “Het nooit die een sonder die ander gesien nie, het ’n mens? Die kere dat hulle hier was – o, hulle het my omtrent laat lag. Twee gebore komediantes, daardie Sirius Swardt en James Potter!”

Harry laat val sy drinkkan met ’n harde klonkgeluid. Ron gee hom ’n skop.

“Presies,” sê professor McGonagall. “Swardt en Potter. Voorbokke van hul eie klein bende. Albei besonder knap, natuurlik – uiters skranders, om die waarheid te sê – maar ek dink nie ons het al ooit weer so ’n paar moeilikheidsmakers gehad nie –”

“Ek weet nie,” sê Hagrid grinnikend. “Fred en George Weasley sal vir hulle opdraande gee.”

“’n Mens sou sê dat Swardt en Potter broers was!” piep professor Flickerpitt. “Onafskeidbaar!”

“Natuurlik was hulle,” sê Broddelwerk. “Potter het vir Swardt bo al sy vriende vertrou. Niks het verander na hulle uit die skool is nie. Swardt was strooijonker toe James met Lily getroud is. Hulle het hom as Harry se peetpa benoem. Harry weet dit natuurlik nie. Julle kan julle net voorstel hoe die idee hom sal folter.”

“Omdat Swardt uiteindelik kop in een mus met Jy-Weet-Wie was?” fluister Madame Rosmerta.

“Erger as dit, my vriendin,” sê Broddelwerk se stem sak en hy gaan in ’n soort lae rammeling voort. “Nie baie mense is daarvan bewus dat die Potters geweet het dat Jy-Weet-Wie agter hulle aan is nie. Dompeldorius, wat Jy-Weet-Wie uit die aard van die saak onvermoeid teengewerk het, het ’n aantal bruikbare spioene gehad. Een van hulle het hom ’n wenk gegee, en hy het dadelik vir James en Lily gewaarsku. Hy het hulle aangeraai om iewers te gaan skuil. Wel, natuurlik is Jy-Weet-Wie nie ’n maklike persoon om voor weg te kruip nie. Dompeldorius het vir hulle gesê dat die Fidelius-towerspreuk hul beste opsie is.”

“Hoe werk dit?” sê Madame Rosmerta, uitasem van belangstelling. Professor Flickerpitt maak sy keel skoon.

“Dit is ’n geweldig ingewikkelde towerspreuk,” sê hy piepend, “wat die magiese verberging van ’n geheim binne-in ’n enkele, lewende wese behels. Die inligting word in die verkose persoon, of Geheimhouer, versteek en is dan onmoontlik om te vind – tensy die Geheimhouer natuurlik besluit om dit te openbaar. Solank die Geheimhouer geweier het om

te praat, sou Jy-Weet-Wie die dorpie waarin Lily en James gebly het vir jare deursoek en hulle nooit gekry het nie, selfs al het hy ook sy neus teen hul sitkamervenster gedruk!"

"Swardt was dus die Potters se Geheimhouer?" fluister Madame Rosmerta.

"Uit die aard van die saak," sê professor McGonagall. "James Potter het vir Dompeldorius gesê dat Swardt eerder sal sterf voor hy sal uitlap waar hulle is, dat Swardt van plan was om self iewers te gaan skuil en tog het Dompeldorius onrustig gebly. Ek onthou dat hy aangebied het om die Potters se Geheimhouer te wees."

"Hy het vir Swardt gewantrou?" sê Madame Rosmerta en snak na asem.

"Hy was oortuig dat iemand na aan die Potters vir Jy-Weet-Wie op hoogte van hul bewegings gehou het," sê professor McGonagall somber. "Hy het inderdaad vir 'n geruime tyd vermoed dat iemand aan ons kant teen ons gedraai het en inligting na Jy-Weet-Wie deurgegee het."

"Tog het James Potter daarop aangedring om vir Swardt te gebruik?"

"Hy het," sê Broddelwerk swaarmoedig. "En toe, skaars 'n week nadat die Fidelius-towerspreuk uitgespreek is –"

"Het Swardt hulle verrai," sê Madame Rosmerta hees.

"Hy het inderdaad. Swardt was moeg vir sy rol as dubbele agent, hy was gereed om sy ondersteuning vir Jy-Weet-Wie openlik te verklaar, en dit lyk of hy dit beplan het vir dié oomblik van die Potters se dood. Soos ons almal egter weet, het Jy-Weet-Wie sy moses teëgekom in die vorm van klein Harry Potter. Hy het gevlug. Sy magte was gebreek en hy was gevaarlik verswak. Dit het Swardt in 'n penarie gelaat. Sy Meester het geval op die oomblik dat hy, Swardt, sy ware kleure as verraaier gewys het. Hy het geen keuse gehad as om voet in die wind te slaan nie –"

"Vieslike, stinkende manteldraaier!" sê Hagrid, so hard dat die helfte van die kroeg stil word.

"Sjij!" sê professor McGonagall.

"Ek het hom teëgekom!" grom Hagrid. "Moet die laaste mens gewees het om hom te sien voor hy al daai mense vermoor het! Dit was ek wat Harry uit Lily en James Potter se huis gered het na hulle doodgemaak is! Het hom uit die puin gehaal, die arme klein dingetjie, met 'n lang haal oor sy voorkop, en sy ouers dood ... en Sirius Swardt het daar aangekom op daardie vlieënde motorfiets waarop hy altyd gery het. Het nooit tot my deurgedring wat hy daar kom maak het nie. Ek't nie geweet dat hy Lily en James se Geheimhouer was nie. Gedag hy't die nuus oor Jy-Weet-Wie se aanval so pas gehoor en dat hy kom kyk het wat hy kan doen. Was wit en aan 't bewe. En weet julle wat het ek gedoen? EK HET DIE MOORDDADIGE VERRAAIER GETROOS!" brul Hagrid.

"Hagrid, asseblief!" sê professor McGonagall. "Nie so hard nie!"

“Hoe moes ek weet dat hy glad nie oor Lily en James ontsteld was nie? Dit was Jy-Weet-Wie oor wie hy hom bekommer het! En toe sê hy, ‘Gee hom vir my, Hagrid, ek is sy peetpa, ek sal na hom kyk –’ Ha! Maar ek het my opdragte van Dompeldorius af gekry, en ek het vir Swardt gesê, nee, Dompeldorius het gesê Harry moet na sy oom en tante gaan. Swardt het gestry, maar op die ou end het hy ingegeë. Vir my gesê om sy motorfiets te vat om vir Harry daar te kry. ‘Ek het dit nie meer nodig nie,’ het hy gesê.

“Ek moet geweet het dat alles nie pluis is nie. Hy was mal oor daardie motorfiets, vir wat staan en gee hy dit vir my? Feit is, dit was te maklik om op te spoor. Dompeldorius het geweet hy was die Potters se Geheimhouer. Swardt het geweet hy sal daardie nag moet spore maak, geweet dis ’n kwessie van ure voor die Ministerie agter hom aan is.

“Maar sê nou ek het Harry vir hom gegee, hê? Ek wed hy sou hom halfpad oor die see van die fiets afgegooi het. Sy beste vriend se seun! Maar as ’n towenaar oorloop na die ander kant, dan’s daar niks en niemand vir wie hy meer omgee nie . . .”

’n Lang stilte volg op Hagrid se verhaal. Toe sê Madame Rosmerta met ’n sekere mate van genoegdoening: “Maar hy het nie daarin geslaag om weg te kom nie, het hy? Die Ministerie vir Towerkuns het hom net die volgende dag vasgetrek!”

“Ag, as ons maar het,” sê Broddelwerk verbitterd. “Dit was nie ons wat hom gekry het nie. Dit was klein Pieter Pansegrouw – nog een van die Potters se vriende. Ongetwyfeld buite sy sinne van smart en siende dat hy geweet het dat Swardt die Potters se Geheimhouer is, het hy self vir Swardt agterna gesit.”

“Pansegrouw . . . daardie vet klein seuntjie wat altyd by Hogwarts al agter hulle aan was?” sê Madame Rosmerta.

“Het die grond aanbid waarop Swardt en Potter geloop het,” sê professor McGonagall. “Nie heeltemal in hul klas wat talent betref nie. Ek was dikwels nogal kortaf met hom. Julle kan net dink hoe ek – hoe ek myself nou verwyt . . .” Sy klink of sy ’n skielike verkoue in die neus ontwikkel het.

“Toe nou, Minerva,” sê Broddelwerk goedaardig. “Pansegrouw het ’n heldedood gesterf. Ooggetuies – Moggels, natuurlik, ons het hul geheues later uitgevee – het vir ons vertel hoe Pansegrouw vir Swardt in ’n hoek gedryf het. Hulle het gesê hy was in trane. ‘Lily en James Potter, Sirius! Hoe kon jy!’ Toe het hy sy towerstaf gegryp. Wel, Swardt was uit die aard van die saak vinniger. Het Pansegrouw aan stukkie geblaas . . .”

Professor McGonagall blaas haar neus en sê skor, “Verspotte seun . . . verspotte seun . . . hy was altyd hopeloos met tweegevegte . . . moes dit vir die Ministerie gelos het . . .”

“Ek sê julle, as ek voor Pansegrouw op Swardt afgekom het, het ek nie

met towerstaffies staan en sukkel nie – ek sou hom met my kaal hande uitmekaar getrek het,” grom Hagrid.

“Jy weet nie waarvan jy praat nie, Hagrid,” sê Broddelwerk kwaai. “Niemand behalwe opgeleide Treftoorders van die Magiese Wetstoepassings-eenheid het ’n kans teen Swardt gehad toe hy eers in ’n hoek gedryf was nie. Ek was in daardie tyd Junior Minister in die Departement van Magiese Katastrofes, en ek was een van die eerstes op die toneel nadat Swardt al daardie mense vermoor het. Ek – ek sal dit nooit vergeet nie. Ek droom nog soms daarvan. ’n Krater in die middel van die straat, so diep dat die rioolpyp daaronder gekraak het. Liggame oraloor. Moggels wat skree. En Swardt wat daar staan en lag, met dit wat van Pansegrouw oor is voor hom . . . ’n houpie bloedbevleekte klere en ’n paar – ’n paar stukke –”

Broddelwerk se stem breek eensklaps af. Daar is die geluid van vyf neuse wat geblaas word.

“Wel, daar het jy dit, Rosmerta,” sê Broddelwerk skor. “Swardt is deur twintig lede van die Magiese Wetstoepassingseenheid in hegtenis geneem en die Orde van Merlin, Eerste Klas, is aan Pansegrouw toegeken, wat, so dink ek, ’n mate van troos vir sy arme moeder was. Van daardie tyd af was Swardt in Azkaban.”

Madame Rosmerta slaak ’n lang sug.

“Is dit waar dat hy mal is, minister?”

“Ek wens ek kon sê hy is,” sê Broddelwerk stadig. “Ek is daarvan oortuig dat sy meester se nederlaag hom tydelik oorstuur het. Die moord op Pansegrouw en al daardie Moggels was die handeling van ’n man wat in ’n hoek gedryf en desperaat was – wreed . . . sinneloos. Tog het ek vir Swardt op my laaste inspeksie by Azkaban ontmoet. Julle moet weet dat die meeste van die gevangenes wat daar is, in die donker by hulself sit en mompel, daar is geen rede meer in hulle nie . . . maar ek was geskok om te sien hoe *normaal* Swardt gelyk het. Hy het heeltemal rationeel met my gepraat. Dit was ontsenuend. ’n Mens sou sê dat hy bloot verveeld was – het gevra of ek klaar is met my koerant, so koel soos ’n komkommer, gesê hy mis die blokkiesraaisels. Ja, ek was verstom dat die Dementors hom so min geaffekteer het – en hy was een van die bes bewaakte gevangenes in die plek, weet julle. Dementors voor sy deur, dag en nag.”

“Maar wat dink julle wil hy doen? Hoekom het hy uitgebreek?” sê Madame Rosmerta. “Grote genade, minister, hy wil darem seker nie weer by Jy-Weet-Wie aansluit nie, of wil hy?”

“Ek verstout my om te sê dat dit sy – h’m – uiteindelijke plan is,” sê Broddelwerk ontwykend. “Ons hoop egter om Swardt lank voor die tyd vas te trek. Ek moet erken, Jy-Weet-Wie, alleen en sonder vriende, is een ding . . . maar gee hom sy mees getroue dienaar terug en ek sidder by die gedagte aan hoe vinnig hy weer opgang sal maak . . .”

Daar is ’n sagte geklink van glas op hout. Iemand het ’n glas neergesit.

"Jy weet, Cornelius, as jy vanaand by die skoolhoof eet, moet ons begin teruggaan kasteel toe," sê professor McGonagall.

Een vir een neem die pare voete voor Harry weer hul elenaars se gewig op hulle; mantels se some swaai buite sig en Madame Rosmerta se blink hakkies verdwyn agter die kroeg. Die deur van die Drie Besemstokke gaan oop, daar is nog 'n warreling van sneeu, en die onderwysers verdwyn.

"Harry?"

Ron en Hermien se gesigte verskyn onder die tafel. Beide van hulle gaap hom woordeloos aan.

CHAPTER ELEVEN



THE FIREBOLT

Harry didn't have a very clear idea of how he had managed to get back into the Honeydukes cellar, through the tunnel, and into the castle once more. All he knew was that the return trip seemed to take no time at all, and that he hardly noticed what he was doing, because his head was still pounding with the conversation he had just heard.

Why had nobody ever told him? Dumbledore, Hagrid, Mr. Weasley, Cornelius Fudge . . . Why hadn't anyone ever mentioned the fact that Harry's parents had died because their best friend had betrayed them?

Ron and Hermione watched Harry nervously all through dinner, not daring to talk about what they'd overheard, because Percy was sitting close by them. When they went upstairs to the crowded common room, it was to find Fred and George had set off half a

dozen Dungbombs in a fit of end-of-term high spirits. Harry, who didn't want Fred and George asking him whether he'd reached Hogsmeade or not, sneaked quietly up to the empty dormitory and headed straight for his bedside cabinet. He pushed his books aside and quickly found what he was looking for — the leather-bound photo album Hagrid had given him two years ago, which was full of wizard pictures of his mother and father. He sat down on his bed, drew the hangings around him, and started turning the pages, searching until . . .

He stopped on a picture of his parents' wedding day. There was his father waving up at him, beaming, the untidy black hair Harry had inherited standing up in all directions. There was his mother, alight with happiness, arm in arm with his dad. And there . . . that must be him. Their best man . . . Harry had never given him a thought before.

If he hadn't known it was the same person, he would never have guessed it was Black in this old photograph. His face wasn't sunken and waxy, but handsome, full of laughter. Had he already been working for Voldemort when this picture had been taken? Was he already planning the deaths of the two people next to him? Did he realize he was facing twelve years in Azkaban, twelve years that would make him unrecognizable?

But the dementors don't affect him, Harry thought, staring into the handsome, laughing face. He doesn't have to hear my mum screaming if they get too close —

Harry slammed the album shut, reached over and stuffed it back into his cabinet, took off his robe and glasses and got into bed, making sure the hangings were hiding him from view.

The dormitory door opened.

“Harry?” said Ron’s voice uncertainly.

But Harry lay still, pretending to be asleep. He heard Ron leave again, and rolled over on his back, his eyes wide open.

A hatred such as he had never known before was coursing through Harry like poison. He could see Black laughing at him through the darkness, as though somebody had pasted the picture from the album over his eyes. He watched, as though somebody was playing him a piece of film, Sirius Black blasting Peter Pettigrew (who resembled Neville Longbottom) into a thousand pieces. He could hear (though having no idea what Black’s voice might sound like) a low, excited mutter: “It has happened, my Lord . . . the Potters have made me their Secret-Keeper. . . .” And then came another voice, laughing shrilly, the same laugh that Harry heard inside his head whenever the dementors drew near. . . .

“Harry, you — you look terrible.”

Harry hadn’t gotten to sleep until daybreak. He had awoken to find the dormitory deserted, dressed, and gone down the spiral staircase to a common room that was completely empty except for Ron, who was eating a Peppermint Toad and massaging his stomach, and Hermione, who had spread her homework over three tables.

“Where is everyone?” said Harry.

“Gone! It’s the first day of the holidays, remember?” said Ron, watching Harry closely. “It’s nearly lunchtime; I was going to come and wake you up in a minute.”

Harry slumped into a chair next to the fire. Snow was still falling

outside the windows. Crookshanks was spread out in front of the fire like a large, ginger rug.

“You really don’t look well, you know,” Hermione said, peering anxiously into his face.

“I’m fine,” said Harry.

“Harry, listen,” said Hermione, exchanging a look with Ron, “you must be really upset about what we heard yesterday. But the thing is, you mustn’t go doing anything stupid.”

“Like what?” said Harry.

“Like trying to go after Black,” said Ron sharply.

Harry could tell they had rehearsed this conversation while he had been asleep. He didn’t say anything.

“You won’t, will you, Harry?” said Hermione.

“Because Black’s not worth dying for,” said Ron.

Harry looked at them. They didn’t seem to understand at all.

“D’you know what I see and hear every time a dementor gets too near me?” Ron and Hermione shook their heads, looking apprehensive. “I can hear my mum screaming and pleading with Voldemort. And if you’d heard your mum screaming like that, just about to be killed, you wouldn’t forget it in a hurry. And if you found out someone who was supposed to be a friend of hers betrayed her and sent Voldemort after her —”

“There’s nothing you can do!” said Hermione, looking stricken. “The dementors will catch Black and he’ll go back to Azkaban and — and serve him right!”

“You heard what Fudge said. Black isn’t affected by Azkaban like normal people are. It’s not a punishment for him like it is for the

others.”

“So what are you saying?” said Ron, looking very tense. “You want to — to kill Black or something?”

“Don’t be silly,” said Hermione in a panicky voice. “Harry doesn’t want to kill anyone, do you, Harry?”

Again, Harry didn’t answer. He didn’t know what he wanted to do. All he knew was that the idea of doing nothing, while Black was at liberty, was almost more than he could stand.

“Malfoy knows,” he said abruptly. “Remember what he said to me in Potions? ‘If it was me, I’d hunt him down myself. . . . I’d want revenge.’”

“You’re going to take Malfoy’s advice instead of ours?” said Ron furiously. “Listen . . . you know what Pettigrew’s mother got back after Black had finished with him? Dad told me — the Order of Merlin, First Class, and Pettigrew’s finger in a box. That was the biggest bit of him they could find. Black’s a madman, Harry, and he’s dangerous —”

“Malfoy’s dad must have told him,” said Harry, ignoring Ron. “He was right in Voldemort’s inner circle —”

“*Say You-Know-Who, will you?*” interjected Ron angrily.

“— so obviously, the Malfoys knew Black was working for Voldemort —”

“— and Malfoy’d love to see you blown into about a million pieces, like Pettigrew! Get a grip. Malfoy’s just hoping you’ll get yourself killed before he has to play you at Quidditch.”

“Harry, *please*,” said Hermione, her eyes now shining with tears, “*please* be sensible. Black did a terrible, terrible thing, but d-don’t

put yourself in danger, it's what Black wants. . . . Oh, Harry, you'd be playing right into Black's hands if you went looking for him. Your mum and dad wouldn't want you to get hurt, would they? They'd never want you to go looking for Black!"

"I'll never know what they'd have wanted, because thanks to Black, I've never spoken to them," said Harry shortly.

There was a silence in which Crookshanks stretched luxuriously, flexing his claws. Ron's pocket quivered.

"Look," said Ron, obviously casting around for a change of subject, "it's the holidays! It's nearly Christmas! Let's — let's go down and see Hagrid. We haven't visited him for ages!"

"No!" said Hermione quickly. "Harry isn't supposed to leave the castle, Ron —"

"Yeah, let's go," said Harry, sitting up, "and I can ask him how come he never mentioned Black when he told me all about my parents!"

Further discussion of Sirius Black plainly wasn't what Ron had had in mind.

"Or we could have a game of chess," he said hastily, "or Gobstones. Percy left a set —"

"No, let's visit Hagrid," said Harry firmly.

So they got their cloaks from their dormitories and set off through the portrait hole ("Stand and fight, you yellow-bellied mongrels!"), down through the empty castle and out through the oak front doors.

They made their way slowly down the lawn, making a shallow trench in the glittering, powdery snow, their socks and the hems of their cloaks soaked and freezing. The Forbidden Forest looked as

though it had been enchanted, each tree smattered with silver, and Hagrid's cabin looked like an iced cake.

Ron knocked, but there was no answer.

"He's not out, is he?" said Hermione, who was shivering under her cloak.

Ron had his ear to the door.

"There's a weird noise," he said. "Listen — is that Fang?"

Harry and Hermione put their ears to the door too. From inside the cabin came a series of low, throbbing moans.

"Think we'd better go and get someone?" said Ron nervously.

"Hagrid!" called Harry, thumping the door. "Hagrid, are you in there?"

There was a sound of heavy footsteps, then the door creaked open. Hagrid stood there with his eyes red and swollen, tears splashing down the front of his leather vest.

"Yeh've heard?" he bellowed, and he flung himself onto Harry's neck.

Hagrid being at least twice the size of a normal man, this was no laughing matter. Harry, about to collapse under Hagrid's weight, was rescued by Ron and Hermione, who each seized Hagrid under an arm and heaved him back into the cabin. Hagrid allowed himself to be steered into a chair and slumped over the table, sobbing uncontrollably, his face glazed with tears that dripped down into his tangled beard.

"Hagrid, what *is* it?" said Hermione, aghast.

Harry spotted an official-looking letter lying open on the table.

"What's this, Hagrid?"

Hagrid's sobs redoubled, but he shoved the letter toward Harry, who picked it up and read aloud:

Dear Mr. Hagrid,

Further to our inquiry into the attack by a hippogriff on a student in your class, we have accepted the assurances of Professor Dumbledore that you bear no responsibility for the regrettable incident.

"Well, that's okay then, Hagrid!" said Ron, clapping Hagrid on the shoulder. But Hagrid continued to sob, and waved one of his gigantic hands, inviting Harry to read on.

However, we must register our concern about the hippogriff in question. We have decided to uphold the official complaint of Mr. Lucius Malfoy, and this matter will therefore be taken to the Committee for the Disposal of Dangerous Creatures. The hearing will take place on April 20th, and we ask you to present yourself and your hippogriff at the Committee's offices in London on that date. In the meantime, the hippogriff should be kept tethered and isolated.

Yours in fellowship . . .

There followed a list of the school governors.

"Oh," said Ron. "But you said Buckbeak isn't a bad hippogriff, Hagrid. I bet he'll get off —"

"Yeh don' know them gargoyles at the Committee fer the Disposal o' Dangerous Creatures!" choked Hagrid, wiping his eyes on his

sleeve. "They've got it in fer interestin' creatures!"

A sudden sound from the corner of Hagrid's cabin made Harry, Ron, and Hermione whip around. Buckbeak the hippogriff was lying in the corner, chomping on something that was oozing blood all over the floor.

"I couldn't leave him tied up out there in the snow!" choked Hagrid. "All on his own! At Christmas."

Harry, Ron, and Hermione looked at one another. They had never seen eye to eye with Hagrid about what he called "interesting creatures" and other people called "terrifying monsters." On the other hand, there didn't seem to be any particular harm in Buckbeak. In fact, by Hagrid's usual standards, he was positively cute.

"You'll have to put up a good strong defense, Hagrid," said Hermione, sitting down and laying a hand on Hagrid's massive forearm. "I'm sure you can prove Buckbeak is safe."

"Won't make no diff'rence!" sobbed Hagrid. "Them Disposal devils, they're all in Lucius Malfoy's pocket! Scared o' him! An' if I lose the case, Buckbeak —"

Hagrid drew his finger swiftly across his throat, then gave a great wail and lurched forward, his face in his arms.

"What about Dumbledore, Hagrid?" said Harry.

"He's done more'n enough fer me already," groaned Hagrid. "Got enough on his plate what with keepin' them dementors outta the castle, an' Sirius Black lurkin' around —"

Ron and Hermione looked quickly at Harry, as though expecting him to start berating Hagrid for not telling him the truth about Black. But Harry couldn't bring himself to do it, not now that he saw Hagrid

so miserable and scared.

“Listen, Hagrid,” he said, “you can’t give up. Hermione’s right, you just need a good defense. You can call us as witnesses —”

“I’m sure I’ve read about a case of hippogriff-baiting,” said Hermione thoughtfully, “where the hippogriff got off. I’ll look it up for you, Hagrid, and see exactly what happened.”

Hagrid howled still more loudly. Harry and Hermione looked at Ron to help them.

“Er — shall I make a cup of tea?” said Ron.

Harry stared at him.

“It’s what my mum does whenever someone’s upset,” Ron muttered, shrugging.

At last, after many more assurances of help, with a steaming mug of tea in front of him, Hagrid blew his nose on a handkerchief the size of a tablecloth and said, “Yer right. I can’ afford to go ter pieces. Gotta pull meself together. . . .”

Fang the boarhound came timidly out from under the table and laid his head on Hagrid’s knee.

“I’ve not bin meself lately,” said Hagrid, stroking Fang with one hand and mopping his face with the other. “Worried abou’ Buckbeak, an’ no one likin’ me classes —”

“We do like them!” lied Hermione at once.

“Yeah, they’re great!” said Ron, crossing his fingers under the table. “Er — how are the flobberworms?”

“Dead,” said Hagrid gloomily. “Too much lettuce.”

“Oh no!” said Ron, his lip twitching.

“An’ them dementors make me feel ruddy terrible an’ all,” said Hagrid, with a sudden shudder. “Gotta walk past ’em ev’ry time I want a drink in the Three Broomsticks. ’S like bein’ back in Azkaban.”

He fell silent, gulping his tea. Harry, Ron, and Hermione watched him breathlessly. They had never heard Hagrid talk about his brief spell in Azkaban before. After a pause, Hermione said timidly, “Is it awful in there, Hagrid?”

“Yeh’ve no idea,” said Hagrid quietly. “Never bin anywhere like it. Thought I was goin’ mad. Kep’ goin’ over horrible stuff in me mind . . . the day I got expelled from Hogwarts . . . day me dad died . . . day I had ter let Norbert go. . . .”

His eyes filled with tears. Norbert was the baby dragon Hagrid had once won in a game of cards.

“Yeh can’ really remember who yeh are after a while. An’ yeh can’ see the point o’ livin’ at all. I used ter hope I’d jus’ die in me sleep. . . . When they let me out, it was like bein’ born again, ev’rythin’ came floodin’ back, it was the bes’ feelin’ in the world. Mind, the dementors weren’t keen on lettin’ me go.”

“But you were innocent!” said Hermione.

Hagrid snorted.

“Think that matters to them? They don’ care. Long as they’ve got a couple o’ hundred humans stuck there with ’em, so they can leech all the happiness out of ’em, they don’ give a damn who’s guilty an’ who’s not.”

Hagrid went quiet for a moment, staring into his tea. Then he said quietly, “Thought o’ jus’ lettin’ Buckbeak go . . . tryin’ ter make him

fly away . . . but how d'yeh explain ter a hippogriff it's gotta go inter hidin'? An' — an' I'm scared o' breakin' the law. . . .” He looked up at them, tears leaking down his face again. “I don' ever want ter go back ter Azkaban.”

The trip to Hagrid's, though far from fun, had nevertheless had the effect Ron and Hermione had hoped. Though Harry had by no means forgotten about Black, he couldn't brood constantly on revenge if he wanted to help Hagrid win his case against the Committee for the Disposal of Dangerous Creatures. He, Ron, and Hermione went to the library the next day and returned to the empty common room laden with books that might help prepare a defense for Buckbeak. The three of them sat in front of the roaring fire, slowly turning the pages of dusty volumes about famous cases of marauding beasts, speaking occasionally when they ran across something relevant.

“Here's something . . . there was a case in 1722 . . . but the hippogriff was convicted — ugh, look what they did to it, that's disgusting —”

“This might help, look — a mantichore savaged someone in 1296, and they let the mantichore off — oh — no, that was only because everyone was too scared to go near it. . . .”

Meanwhile, in the rest of the castle, the usual magnificent Christmas decorations had been put up, despite the fact that hardly any of the students remained to enjoy them. Thick streamers of holly and mistletoe were strung along the corridors, mysterious lights shone from inside every suit of armor, and the Great Hall was filled with its usual twelve Christmas trees, glittering with golden stars. A powerful and delicious smell of cooking pervaded the corridors, and

by Christmas Eve, it had grown so strong that even Scabbers poked his nose out of the shelter of Ron's pocket to sniff hopefully at the air.

On Christmas morning, Harry was woken by Ron throwing his pillow at him.

"Oi! Presents!"

Harry reached for his glasses and put them on, squinting through the semi-darkness to the foot of his bed, where a small heap of parcels had appeared. Ron was already ripping the paper off his own presents.

"Another sweater from Mum . . . maroon *again* . . . see if you've got one."

Harry had. Mrs. Weasley had sent him a scarlet sweater with the Gryffindor lion knitted on the front; also a dozen home-baked mince pies, some Christmas cake, and a box of nut brittle. As he moved all these things aside, he saw a long, thin package lying underneath.

"What's that?" said Ron, looking over, a freshly unwrapped pair of maroon socks in his hand.

"Dunno . . ."

Harry ripped the parcel open and gasped as a magnificent, gleaming broomstick rolled out onto his bedspread. Ron dropped his socks and jumped off his bed for a closer look.

"I don't believe it," he said hoarsely.

It was a Firebolt, identical to the dream broom Harry had gone to see every day in Diagon Alley. Its handle glittered as he picked it up. He could feel it vibrating and let go; it hung in midair, unsupported, at exactly the right height for him to mount it. His eyes moved from the golden registration number at the top of the handle, right down to

the perfectly smooth, streamlined birch twigs that made up the tail.

“Who sent it to you?” said Ron in a hushed voice.

“Look and see if there’s a card,” said Harry.

Ron ripped apart the Firebolt’s wrappings.

“Nothing! Blimey, who’d spend that much on you?”

“Well,” said Harry, feeling stunned, “I’m betting it wasn’t the Dursleys.”

“I bet it was Dumbledore,” said Ron, now walking around and around the Firebolt, taking in every glorious inch. “He sent you the Invisibility Cloak anonymously. . . .”

“That was my dad’s, though,” said Harry. “Dumbledore was just passing it on to me. He wouldn’t spend hundreds of Galleons on me. He can’t go giving students stuff like this —”

“That’s why he wouldn’t say it was from him!” said Ron. “In case some git like Malfoy said it was favoritism. Hey, Harry” — Ron gave a great whoop of laughter — “*Malfoy!* Wait till he sees you on this! He’ll be sick as a pig! This is an *international* standard broom, this is!”

“I can’t believe this,” Harry muttered, running a hand along the Firebolt, while Ron sank onto Harry’s bed, laughing his head off at the thought of Malfoy. “*Who — ?*”

“I know,” said Ron, controlling himself, “I know who it could’ve been — Lupin!”

“What?” said Harry, now starting to laugh himself. “*Lupin?* Listen, if he had this much gold, he’d be able to buy himself some new robes.”

“Yeah, but he likes you,” said Ron. “And he was away when your

Nimbus got smashed, and he might've heard about it and decided to visit Diagon Alley and get this for you —"

"What d'you mean, he was away?" said Harry. "He was ill when I was playing in that match."

"Well, he wasn't in the hospital wing," said Ron. "I was there, cleaning out the bedpans on that detention from Snape, remember?"

Harry frowned at Ron.

"I can't see Lupin affording something like this."

"What're you two laughing about?"

Hermione had just come in, wearing her dressing gown and carrying Crookshanks, who was looking very grumpy, with a string of tinsel tied around his neck.

"Don't bring him in here!" said Ron, hurriedly snatching Scabbers from the depths of his bed and stowing him in his pajama pocket. But Hermione wasn't listening. She dropped Crookshanks onto Seamus's empty bed and stared, open-mouthed, at the Firebolt.

"Oh, *Harry*! Who sent you *that*?"

"No idea," said Harry. "There wasn't a card or anything with it."

To his great surprise, Hermione did not appear either excited or intrigued by the news. On the contrary, her face fell, and she bit her lip.

"What's the matter with you?" said Ron.

"I don't know," said Hermione slowly, "but it's a bit odd, isn't it? I mean, this is supposed to be quite a good broom, isn't it?"

Ron sighed exasperatedly.

"It's the best broom there is, Hermione," he said.

“So it must’ve been really expensive. . . .”

“Probably cost more than all the Slytherins’ brooms put together,” said Ron happily.

“Well . . . who’d send Harry something as expensive as that, and not even tell him they’d sent it?” said Hermione.

“Who cares?” said Ron impatiently. “Listen, Harry, can I have a go on it? Can I?”

“I don’t think anyone should ride that broom just yet!” said Hermione shrilly.

Harry and Ron looked at her.

“What d’you think Harry’s going to do with it — sweep the floor?” said Ron.

But before Hermione could answer, Crookshanks sprang from Seamus’s bed, right at Ron’s chest.

“GET — HIM — OUT — OF — HERE!” Ron bellowed as Crookshanks’s claws ripped his pajamas and Scabbers attempted a wild escape over his shoulder. Ron seized Scabbers by the tail and aimed a misjudged kick at Crookshanks that hit the trunk at the end of Harry’s bed, knocking it over and causing Ron to hop up and down, howling with pain.

Crookshanks’s fur suddenly stood on end. A shrill, tinny whistling was filling the room. The Pocket Sneakoscope had become dislodged from Uncle Vernon’s old socks and was whirling and gleaming on the floor.

“I forgot about that!” Harry said, bending down and picking up the Sneakoscope. “I never wear those socks if I can help it. . . .”

The Sneakoscope whirled and whistled in his palm. Crookshanks

was hissing and spitting at it.

“You’d better take that cat out of here, Hermione,” said Ron furiously, sitting on Harry’s bed nursing his toe. “Can’t you shut that thing up?” he added to Harry as Hermione strode out of the room, Crookshanks’s yellow eyes still fixed maliciously on Ron.

Harry stuffed the Sneakoscope back inside the socks and threw it back into his trunk. All that could be heard now were Ron’s stifled moans of pain and rage. Scabbers was huddled in Ron’s hands. It had been a while since Harry had seen him out of Ron’s pocket, and he was unpleasantly surprised to see that Scabbers, once so fat, was now very skinny; patches of fur seemed to have fallen out too.

“He’s not looking too good, is he?” Harry said.

“It’s stress!” said Ron. “He’d be fine if that big stupid furball left him alone!”

But Harry, remembering what the woman at the Magical Menagerie had said about rats living only three years, couldn’t help feeling that unless Scabbers had powers he had never revealed, he was reaching the end of his life. And despite Ron’s frequent complaints that Scabbers was both boring and useless, he was sure Ron would be very miserable if Scabbers died.

Christmas spirit was definitely thin on the ground in the Gryffindor common room that morning. Hermione had shut Crookshanks in her dormitory, but was furious with Ron for trying to kick him; Ron was still fuming about Crookshanks’s fresh attempt to eat Scabbers. Harry gave up trying to make them talk to each other and devoted himself to examining the Firebolt, which he had brought down to the common room with him. For some reason this seemed to annoy Hermione as

well; she didn't say anything, but she kept looking darkly at the broom as though it too had been criticizing her cat.

At lunchtime they went down to the Great Hall, to find that the House tables had been moved against the walls again, and that a single table, set for twelve, stood in the middle of the room. Professors Dumbledore, McGonagall, Snape, Sprout, and Flitwick were there, along with Filch, the caretaker, who had taken off his usual brown coat and was wearing a very old and rather moldy-looking tailcoat. There were only three other students, two extremely nervous-looking first years and a sullen-faced Slytherin fifth year.

"Merry Christmas!" said Dumbledore as Harry, Ron, and Hermione approached the table. "As there are so few of us, it seemed foolish to use the House tables. . . . Sit down, sit down!"

Harry, Ron, and Hermione sat down side by side at the end of the table.

"Crackers!" said Dumbledore enthusiastically, offering the end of a large silver noisemaker to Snape, who took it reluctantly and tugged. With a bang like a gunshot, the cracker flew apart to reveal a large, pointed witch's hat topped with a stuffed vulture.

Harry, remembering the boggart, caught Ron's eye and they both grinned; Snape's mouth thinned and he pushed the hat toward Dumbledore, who swapped it for his wizard's hat at once.

"Dig in!" he advised the table, beaming around.

As Harry was helping himself to roast potatoes, the doors of the Great Hall opened again. It was Professor Trelawney, gliding toward them as though on wheels. She had put on a green sequined dress in honor of the occasion, making her look more than ever like a

glittering, oversized dragonfly.

“Sybill, this is a pleasant surprise!” said Dumbledore, standing up.

“I have been crystal gazing, Headmaster,” said Professor Trelawney in her mistiest, most faraway voice, “and to my astonishment, I saw myself abandoning my solitary luncheon and coming to join you. Who am I to refuse the promptings of fate? I at once hastened from my tower, and I do beg you to forgive my lateness. . . .”

“Certainly, certainly,” said Dumbledore, his eyes twinkling. “Let me draw you up a chair —”

And he did indeed draw a chair in midair with his wand, which revolved for a few seconds before falling with a thud between Professors Snape and McGonagall. Professor Trelawney, however, did not sit down; her enormous eyes had been roving around the table, and she suddenly uttered a kind of soft scream.

“I dare not, Headmaster! If I join the table, we shall be thirteen! Nothing could be more unlucky! Never forget that when thirteen dine together, the first to rise will be the first to die!”

“We’ll risk it, Sybill,” said Professor McGonagall impatiently. “Do sit down, the turkey’s getting stone cold.”

Professor Trelawney hesitated, then lowered herself into the empty chair, eyes shut and mouth clenched tight, as though expecting a thunderbolt to hit the table. Professor McGonagall poked a large spoon into the nearest tureen.

“Tripe, Sybill?”

Professor Trelawney ignored her. Eyes open again, she looked around once more and said, “But where is dear Professor Lupin?”

"I'm afraid the poor fellow is ill again," said Dumbledore, indicating that everybody should start serving themselves. "Most unfortunate that it should happen on Christmas Day."

"But surely you already knew that, Sybill?" said Professor McGonagall, her eyebrows raised.

Professor Trelawney gave Professor McGonagall a very cold look.

"Certainly I knew, Minerva," she said quietly. "But one does not parade the fact that one is All-Knowing. I frequently act as though I am not possessed of the Inner Eye, so as not to make others nervous."

"That explains a great deal," said Professor McGonagall tartly.

Professor Trelawney's voice suddenly became a good deal less misty.

"If you must know, Minerva, I have seen that poor Professor Lupin will not be with us for very long. He seems aware, himself, that his time is short. He positively fled when I offered to crystal gaze for him —"

"Imagine that," said Professor McGonagall dryly.

"I doubt," said Dumbledore, in a cheerful but slightly raised voice, which put an end to Professor McGonagall and Professor Trelawney's conversation, "that Professor Lupin is in any immediate danger. Severus, you've made the potion for him again?"

"Yes, Headmaster," said Snape.

"Good," said Dumbledore. "Then he should be up and about in no time. . . . Derek, have you had any of these chipolatas? They're excellent."

The first-year boy went furiously red on being addressed directly.

by Dumbledore, and took the platter of sausages with trembling hands.

Professor Trelawney behaved almost normally until the very end of Christmas dinner, two hours later. Full to bursting with Christmas dinner and still wearing their party hats, Harry and Ron got up first from the table and she shrieked loudly.

“My dears! Which of you left his seat first? Which?”

“Dunno,” said Ron, looking uneasily at Harry.

“I doubt it will make much difference,” said Professor McGonagall coldly, “unless a mad axe-man is waiting outside the doors to slaughter the first into the entrance hall.”

Even Ron laughed. Professor Trelawney looked highly affronted.

“Coming?” Harry said to Hermione.

“No,” Hermione muttered, “I want a quick word with Professor McGonagall.”

“Probably trying to see if she can take any more classes,” yawned Ron as they made their way into the entrance hall, which was completely devoid of mad axe-men.

When they reached the portrait hole, they found Sir Cadogan enjoying a Christmas party with a couple of monks, several previous headmasters of Hogwarts, and his fat pony. He pushed up his visor and toasted them with a flagon of mead.

“Merry — hic — Christmas! Password?”

“Scurvy cur,” said Ron.

“And the same to you, sir!” roared Sir Cadogan as the painting swung forward to admit them.

Harry went straight up to the dormitory, collected the Firebolt and

the Broomstick Servicing Kit Hermione had given him for his birthday, brought them downstairs, and tried to find something to do to the Firebolt; however, there were no bent twigs to clip, and the handle was so shiny already it seemed pointless to polish it. He and Ron simply sat admiring it from every angle until the portrait hole opened, and Hermione came in, accompanied by Professor McGonagall.

Though Professor McGonagall was head of Gryffindor House, Harry had seen her in the common room only once before, and that had been to make a very grave announcement. He and Ron stared at her, both holding the Firebolt. Hermione walked around them, sat down, picked up the nearest book, and hid her face behind it.

“So that’s it, is it?” said Professor McGonagall beadily, walking over to the fireside and staring at the Firebolt. “Miss Granger has just informed me that you have been sent a broomstick, Potter.”

Harry and Ron looked around at Hermione. They could see her forehead reddening over the top of her book, which was upside down.

“May I?” said Professor McGonagall, but she didn’t wait for an answer before pulling the Firebolt out of their hands. She examined it carefully from handle to twig-ends. “Hmm. And there was no note at all, Potter? No card? No message of any kind?”

“No,” said Harry blankly.

“I see . . .” said Professor McGonagall. “Well, I’m afraid I will have to take this, Potter.”

“W-what?” said Harry, scrambling to his feet. “Why?”

“It will need to be checked for jinxes,” said Professor

McGonagall. "Of course, I'm no expert, but I daresay Madam Hooch and Professor Flitwick will strip it down —"

"Strip it down?" repeated Ron, as though Professor McGonagall was mad.

"It shouldn't take more than a few weeks," said Professor McGonagall. "You will have it back if we are sure it is jinx-free."

"There's nothing wrong with it!" said Harry, his voice shaking slightly. "Honestly, Professor —"

"You can't know that, Potter," said Professor McGonagall, quite kindly, "not until you've flown it, at any rate, and I'm afraid that is out of the question until we are certain that it has not been tampered with. I shall keep you informed."

Professor McGonagall turned on her heel and carried the Firebolt out of the portrait hole, which closed behind her. Harry stood staring after her, the tin of High-Finish Polish still clutched in his hands. Ron, however, rounded on Hermione.

"What did you go running to McGonagall for?"

Hermione threw her book aside. She was still pink in the face, but stood up and faced Ron defiantly.

"Because I thought — and Professor McGonagall agrees with me — that that broom was probably sent to Harry by Sirius Black!"

Die Vuurslag

Harry weet regtig nie hoe hy dit reggekry het om terug in Honeydukes se kelder, deur die tunnel en weer in die kasteel te kom nie. Al wat hy weet, is dat dit gevoel het asof die pad terug baie kort was, en dat sy kop so geklop het na die gesprek wat hy afgeluister het dat hy skaars geweet het wat hy doen.

Hoekom het niemand nog ooit vir hom gesê nie? Dompeldorius, Hagrid, mnr. Weasley, Cornelius Broddelwerk . . . hoekom het niemand die feit dat Harry se ouers dood is omdat hul beste vriend hulle verrai het, nog ooit aan hom genoem nie?

Daardie aand aan tafel hou Ron en Hermien vir Harry senuagtig dop. Hulle waag dit nie om te praat oor wat hulle gehoor het nie, want Percy sit te na aan hulle. Toe hulle boontoe na die stampvol geselskamer gaan, vind hulle dat Fred en George, in 'n bevlieging van einde-van-die-kwartaal lawwigheid, 'n halfdosyn Misbomme gegooi het. Harry, wat nie wil hê dat Fred en George vir hom moet vra of hy wel na Hogsmeade gegaan het nie, glip stilletjies op na die leë slaapsaal en gaan reguit na sy bedkassie. Hy stoot sy boeke opsy en kry sommer gou wat hy soek – die leerbandfotoalbum wat Hagrid twee jaar gelede vir hom gegee het, en wat vol towerfoto's van sy ma en pa is. Hy gaan sit op sy bed, trek die behangsels om hom toe en begin blaai op soek na . . .

Hy stop by 'n foto van sy ouers se troudag. Daar waai sy pa met 'n breë glimlag vir hom, met die slordige swart hare wat Harry by hom geërf het en wat in alle rigtings staan. Daar is sy ma, stralend van vreugde, arm in arm met sy pa. En daar . . . dit moet hy wees. Hul strooijonker . . . Harry het nog nooit juis oor hom gewonder nie.

As hy nie geweet het dat dit dieselfde persoon is nie, sou hy nooit kon raai dat dit Swardt op hierdie ou foto is nie. Sy gesig is nie versionke en wasagtig nie, maar aantreklik en vol lag. Het hy reeds vir Woldemort begin werk toe hierdie foto geneem is? Het hy reeds die dood van die twee mense langs hom beplan? Het hy besef dat hy vir twaalf jaar in Azkaban gaan sit, twaalf jaar wat hom onherkenbaar sou maak?

Maar die Dementors doen niks aan hom nie, dink Harry terwyl hy na die

aantreklike, laggende gesig staan. Hy *hoef nie na my ma se geskree te luister as hulle te naby aan hom kom nie* –

Harry slaan die album toe, buig oor en sit dit terug in sy bedkassie, trek sy kleed uit en haal sy bril af. Toe hy bed toe gaan, maak hy seker dat die behangsels heeltemal toegetrek is.

Die slaapsaal se deur gaan oop.

“Harry?” sê Ron se stem onseker.

Harry lê tjoepstil en maak of hy slaap. Hy hoor hoe Ron weer uitgaan, toe rol hy om op sy rug met sy oë wyd oop.

’n Gevoel van haat soos hy nog nooit tevore ervaar het nie, vloei soos gif deur Harry se are. Hy sien hoe Swardt deur die duisternis vir hom lag, nes of iemand die foto in die album oor sy oë geplak het. Hy sien, soos op ’n ou film, hoe Sirius Swardt vir Pieter Pansegrouw (wat baie soos Neville Loggerenberg lyk) aan duisend stukkies blaas. Hy hoor (hoewel hy nie ’n idee het hoe Swardt se stem klink nie) ’n gedempte, opgewonde gemompel. “Dit het gebeur, my heer . . . die Potters het my hul Geheimhouer gemaak . . .” En toe kom nog ’n stem wat skril lag, dieselfde gelag wat Harry binne-in sy kop hoor elke keer dat die Dementors nader kom . . .

“Harry, jy – jy lyk verskriklik.”

Harry het tot met dagbreek nie geslaap nie. Toe hy wakker word, is die slaapsaal verlate. Hy staan op en loop af met die wenteltrap na die geselskamer wat heeltemal leeg is, buiten Ron wat ’n Pepermentpadda geëet het en sy maag vryf, en Hermien wat haar huiswerk oor drie tafels oopgesprei het.

“Waar is almal?” sê Harry.

“Weg! Dis die eerste dag van die vakansie, onthou?” sê Ron wat stip na Harry kyk. “Dis amper etenstyd. Ek was op pad om jou oor ’n minuut te kom wakker maak.”

Harry val neer in ’n stoel langs die vuur. Buite die vensters sneeu dit nog steeds. Kromskeen lê oopgespalk voor die vuur soos ’n groot gemmermat.

“Jy lyk regtig nie goed nie, weet jy,” sê Hermien, terwyl sy bekommerd na sy gesig kyk.

“Ek makeer niks,” sê Harry.

“Luister, Harry,” sê Hermien en loer vlugtig na Ron, “jy moet regtig ontsteld wees oor wat ons gister gehoor het, maar die ding is, jy moenie iets doms gaan staan en doen nie.”

“Soos wat?” sê Harry.

“Soos om agter Swardt aan te gaan,” sê Ron skerp.

Harry kan sien dat hulle hierdie gesprek gerepeteer het toe hy nog geslaap het. Hy sê egter niks.

“Jy sal nie, nè, Harry?” sê Hermien.

"Swardt is dit nie werd om voor dood te gaan nie," sê Ron.

Harry kyk na hulle. Dit lyk nie of hulle enigsins verstaan nie.

"Weet julle wat ek hoor en sien elke keer dat 'n Dementor te na aan my kom?" Ron en Hermien skud hul koppe en lyk lugtig. "Ek hoor hoe my ma skree en hoe sy by Woldemort pleit. En as julle jul ma's so moet hoor skree net voor sy vermoor word, dan sal julle dit ook nie maklik vergeet nie. En as julle moet uitvind dat iemand wat kamma 'n vriend van haar was, haar verraaï het en vir Woldemort gesê het waar sy is –"

"Daar is niks wat jy kan doen nie!" sê Hermien en sy lyk baie hartseer. "Die Dementors sal vir Swardt vang en hy sal terug Azkaban toe gaan en – en dis sy verdiende loon!"

"Julle het gehoor wat Broddelwerk gesê het. Azkaban doen niks aan Swardt nie. Dis nie vir hom 'n straf soos vir ander gewone mense nie."

"Wat probeer jy sê?" vra Ron en hy lyk gespanne. "Wil jy dan – wil jy vir Swardt doodmaak of iets?"

"Moenie verspot wees nie," sê Hermien in 'n paniekerige stem. "Harry wil niemand doodmaak nie, wil jy, Harry?"

Weer antwoord Harry nie. Hy weet nie wat hy wil doen nie. Al wat hy weet, is dat die idee om niks te doen terwyl Swardt op vrye voet is, amper meer is as wat hy kan verduur.

"Malfoy weet," sê hy skielik. "Onthou julle wat hy vir my in die Toewerdrankieklas gesê het? 'As dit ek moet wees, sal ek hom persoonlik gaan soek . . . ek sal wraak sweer.'"

"Jy gaan darem seker nie Malfoy se raad bo ons s'n neem nie?" sê Ron woedend. "Luister . . . weet jy wat Pansegrouw se ma gekry het na Swardt met hom klaar was? My pa het my vertel – die Orde van Merlin, Eerste Klas, en Pansegrouw se vinger in 'n dosie. Dit was die grootste stukkie van hom wat hulle kon kry. Swardt is 'n mal mens, Harry, en hy's gevaarlik –"

"Malfoy se pa moet hom vertel het," sê Harry terwyl hy Ron ignoreer. "Hy was reg in Woldemort se binneste sirkel –"

"Sê Jy-Weet-Wie, oukei?" sê Ron ergerlik.

"– dis dus duidelik dat die Malfoys geweet het dat Swardt vir Woldemort werk –"

"– en Malfoy sal dit gate uit geniet as jy, soos Pansegrouw, in 'n miljoen stukkies geblaas word! Kom by! Malfoy hoop jy sal jouself laat vermoor sodat hy nie Kwiddiek teen jou hoef te speel nie."

"Harry, asseblief," sê Hermien en haar oë blink van die trane, "wees asseblief verstandig. Swardt het iets vreeslik ergs gedoen, m-maar moenie jouself in gevaar stel nie, dis wat Swardt wil hê . . . o, Harry, jy sal reg in Swardt se hand speel as jy hom gaan soek. Jou ma en pa sou nie wou hê dat jy moet seerkry nie, of hoe? Hulle sou nie wou hê dat jy vir Swardt moet gaan soek nie!"

"Ek sal nooit weet wat hulle wou hê nie, want danksy Swardt het ek nog nooit met hulle gepraat nie," sê Harry kortaf.

Daar is 'n stilte waarin Kromskeen homself lank uitrek en sy naels uitbuig. Ron se hemsak bewe.

"Kyk," sê Ron en dis duidelik dat hy rondval vir 'n ander onderwerp, "dis vakansie! Dis amper Kersfees! Kom – kom ons gaan kuier vir Hagrid. Ons was jare laas daar!"

"Neel!" sê Hermien vinnig. "Harry is nie veronderstel om uit die kas teel te gaan nie, Ron."

"Ja, kom ons gaan," sê Harry terwyl hy regop kom, "dan kan ek hom vra hoekom hy nooit iets van Swardt gesê het toe hy my alles oor my ouers vertel het nie!"

'n Verdere gesprek oor Sirius Swardt is duidelik nie wat Ron in gedagte gehad het nie.

"Of kom ons speel 'n potjie skaak," sê hy haastig, "of Spoecklippe. Percy het 'n stel hier gelos –"

"Nee, kom ons gaan kuier vir Hagrid," sê Harry beslis.

Hulle gaan haal hul mantels uit hul slaapsale, klim deur die portretopening ("Staan en veg, julle lafhartige basterbrakke!") en loop deur die leë kasteel en uit by die eikehoutvoor deur.

Toe hulle sukkelend oor die grasperk stap, maak hulle 'n vlak groef in die glinsterende, poeierige sneeu en hul sokkies en die some van hul klede is bevrore en nat. Die Verbode Woud lyk asof dit betower is; elke boom is besprinkel met silwer en Hagrid se hut lyk soos 'n groot versierde koek.

Ron klop, maar niemand antwoord nie.

"Hy's nie uit nie, is hy?" sê Hermien, wat onder haar kleed bewe.

Ron hou sy oor teen die deur.

"Daar's 'n snaakse geluid," sê hy. "Luister – is dit Tande?"

Harry en Hermien sit hul ore ook teen die deur. Van binne die hut kom 'n reeks gedempte kreungeluide.

"Dink julle ons moet iemand gaan haal?" sê Ron senuagtig.

"Hagrid!" roep Harry en stamp teen die deur. "Hagrid, is jy daar?"

Daar is die geluid van swaar voetstappe, toe gaan die deur krakend oop en daar staan Hagrid met rooigeswelde oë en trane wat oor die voorkant van sy leeronderbaadjie drup.

"Julle het gehoor!" bulk hy en gooi homself om Harry se nek.

Met dié dat Hagrid ten minste twee keer so groot as 'n normale mens is, is dit geen grap nie. Harry is op die punt om onder Hagrid se gewig ineen te stort, maar hy word gered deur Ron en Hermien wat elkeen vir Hagrid aan 'n arm gryp en hom, met Harry se hulp, die hut insleep. Hagrid laat toe dat hulle hom na 'n stoel stuur en val oor die tafel terwyl hy onbeheersd snik, sy gesig blink van die trane wat tot in sy gekoekte baard drup.

“Hagrid, wat gaan aan?” sê Hermien geskok.

Harry merk ’n amptelike brief wat oop op die tafel lê.

“Wat’s dit, Hagrid?”

Hagrid se snikke neem toe, maar hy stoot die brief na Harry wat dit optel en hardop lees:

Geagte mnr. Hagrid,

Met verwysing na ons ondersoek na die aanval op ’n student in u klas deur ’n Hippogrief, aanvaar ons die versekerings van professor Dompeldorius dat u nie vir die ongelukkige voorval verantwoordelik is nie.

“Wel, dis dan mos oukei, Hagrid!” sê Ron en slaan vir Hagrid op die skouer. Hagrid huil egter voort, wuif met een van sy enorme hande en wys vir Harry om verder te lees.

Ons moet egter ons kommer oor die betrokke Hippogrief uitspreek. Ons het besluit om die amptelike klag van mnr. Lucius Malfoy te bekragtig, en die saak sal dus na die Komitee vir die Vernietiging van Gevaarlike Creature verwys word. Die verhoor sal op 20 April plaasvind en ons versoek dat u sowel as die betrokke Hippogrief op daardie datum by die komitee se kantoor in Londen sal aanmeld. Ondertussen moet die Hippogrief vasgemaak wees en in afsondering gehou word.

Die uwe.

’n Lys van skoolraadslede volg.

“Oe,” sê Ron, “maar jy’t dan gesê Bokbok is nie ’n slegte Hippogrief nie, Hagrid. Ek wed hy sal vry kom –”

“Julle ken nie die klomp drake op daardie Komitee vir die Vernietiging van Gevaarlike Creature nie!” wurg Hagrid dit uit terwyl hy sy oë aan sy mou afvee. “Hulle het hul mes in vir interessante diertjies!”

’n Skielike geluid vanuit die hoek van Hagrid se hut laat Harry, Ron en Hermien omswaai. Bokbok die Hippogrief lê in ’n hoek van die vertrek en kou aan iets wat bloed oor die hele vloer mors.

“Ek kan hom mos nie daar in die sneeu vasgemaak laat staan nie!” snik Hagrid. “So op sy eentjie! En dis nog Krismis ook!”

Harry, Ron en Hermien kyk na mekaar. Hulle kon nog nooit met Hagrid saamstem oor wat hy “interessante diertjies” noem en wat ander mense “vreesaanjaende monsters” sou noem nie. Tog lyk dit nie of daar werklik enige kwaad in Bokbok steek nie. Om die waarheid te sê, teen Hagrid se gewone standarde is hy voorwaar nogal oulik.

“Jy sal die saak vir die verdediging baie sterk moet stel, Hagrid,” sê Hermien wat gaan sit het en ’n hand op Hagrid se massiewe voorarm lê.

“Ek is seker jy kan bewys dat Bokbok onskuldig is –”

"Sal nie help nie!" snik Hagrid. "Daardie Vernietigingsduiwels is almal in Lucius Malfoy se sak! Bang vir hom! En as ek die saak verloor, dan is Bokbok –"

Hagrid trek sy vinger vinnig oor sy keel, uiter 'n vreeslike kreet en val vooroor met sy gesig op sy arms.

"Wat van Dompeldorius, Hagrid?" sê Harry.

"Hy't al meer as genoeg vir my gedoen," kreun Hagrid. "Het genoeg hooi op sy vurk met daardie Dementors wat hy uit die kasteel moet hou en Sirius Swardt wat oral rondsluip –"

Ron en Hermien loer vinnig na Harry asof hulle verwag dat hy vir Hagrid gaan uitskel omdat hy nie die waarheid oor Swardt vertel het nie. Harry kan homself egter nie so ver bring om dit te doen nie, nie noudat hy sien hoe verskrik en mistroostig Hagrid lyk nie.

"Luister, Hagrid," sê hy, "jy mag nie moed opgee nie. Hermien is reg, jy het 'n goeie verdediging nodig. Jy kan ons as getuies roep –"

"Ek is seker ek het lewens iets gelees oor 'n saak waar 'n Hippogrief getart is," sê Hermien peinsend, "en waar die Hippogrief vrygespreek is. Ek sal dit vir jou gaan naslaan, Hagrid, en kyk presies wat gebeur het."

Hagrid huil net nog harder. Harry en Hermien kyk na Ron vir hulp.

"H'm – sal ek 'n koppie tee gaan maak?" sê Ron.

Harry gaap hom aan.

"Dis wat my ma altyd doen as iemand ontsteld is," mompel Ron en haal sy skouers op.

Uiteindelik, na nog vele ondernemings van hulp, en met 'n stomende beker tee voor hom, snuit Hagrid sy neus aan 'n sakdoek wat so groot soos 'n tafeldoek is en sê, "Julle is reg. Ek kan dit nie bekostig om ineen te stort nie. Moet myself regruk . . ."

Tande die beerhond kom skigtig onder die tafel uit en laat sy kop op Harry se knie rus.

"Ek was die laaste tyd nie myself nie," sê Hagrid terwyl hy vir Tande met een hand streel en met die ander oor sy gesig vee. "Bekommerd oor Bokbok, en niemand hou van my klasse nie –"

"Ons hou daarvan!" jok Hermien dadelik.

"Ja, dis lekker!" sê Ron terwyl hy sy vingers onder die tafel kruis. "H'm – hoe gaan dit met die Flobberwurms?"

"Dood," sê Hagrid bedruk. "Te veel slaaiblare."

"Ag, nee!" sê Ron en sy lip bewe.

"En daardie Dementors laat my verskriklik goor voel en alles," sê Hagrid met 'n skielike siddering. "Moet verby hulle loop elke keer dat ek iets in die Drie Besemstokke wil gaan drink. Is nes of ek terug is in Azkaban –"

Hy word skielik stil en vat 'n paar slukke tee. Harry, Ron en Hermien wag asemloos. Hulle het Hagrid nog nooit oor sy kort verblyf in Azkaban

hoor praat nie. Na 'n kort stilte vra Hermien huiwertig, "Is dit aaklig daar, Hagrid?"

"Jy't nie 'n idee nie," sê Hagrid sag. "Was nog nooit op so 'n plek nie. Dag ek raak mal. Dink oor en oor aan aaklige goed . . . die dag toe ek uit Hogwarts geskors is . . . die dag toe my pa dood is . . . die dag toe ek vir Norbert moes laat gaan het . . ."

Sy oë skiet vol tranes. Norbert was die babadrakke wat Hagrid eenkeer met kaartspeel gewen het.

"Later kan jy nie meer lekker onthou hoekom jy daar is nie. En jy kan nie sien hoekom jy nog moet lewe nie. Ek het gewens ek gaan sommer dood in my slaap . . . toe hulle my vrygelaat het, was dit soos om weer gebore te word, alles het teruggekom, dit was die beste gevoel in die wêreld. Maar daardie Dementors was nie lus om my te laat gaan nie."

"Maar jy was onskuldig!" sê Hermien.

Hagrid snork.

"Dink jy dit traak hulle? Hulle voel vere. Solank hulle 'n paar honderd mense daar by hulle het uit wie hulle alle vreugde kan suig, skeel dit hulle min wie skuldig of onskuldig is."

Hagrid word vir 'n oomblik stil en tuur na sy toe. Toe sê hy stilweg, "Het daaraan gedink om Bokbok sommer net te laat gaan . . . hom te dwing om weg te vlieg . . . maar hoe sê jy vir 'n Hippogrief dat hy moet gaan wegkruip? En — ek is bang om die wet te oortree . . ." Hy kyk op na hulle en die trane loop weer eens oor sy gesig. "Ek wil nooit weer na Azkaban toe gaan nie."

Die uitstappie na Hagrid was alles behalwe pret, maar dit het tog die uitwerking waarop Ron en Hermien gehoop het. Hoewel Harry hoegenaamd nie van Swardt vergeet het nie, kan hy nie heeltyd oor wraak loop en broei nie, nie as hy vir Hagrid wil help om sy saak teen die Komitee vir die Vernietiging van Gevaarlike Creature te wen nie. Hy, Ron en Hermien gaan die volgende dag biblioteek toe en toe hulle terug kamer toe gaan, is hulle arms gelaat met boeke wat hulle kan help om Bokbok se saak vir die verdediging voor te berei.

Die driestuks sit voor die knetterende vuur en blaai stadig deur stowwerige volumes oor beroemde sake rakende probleemdiere, en praat net nou en dan wanneer hulle iets wat ter sake is, teëkom.

"Hier's iets . . . daar was 'n geval in 1722 . . . maar die Hippogrief is te-reggestel — ūg, kyk wat het hulle gedoen, dis verskriklik —"

"Dit kan dalk help, kyk — in 1296 het 'n Mantikorium iemand verskeur en hulle het die Mantikorium laat gaan — o — nee, dit was net omdat almal te bang was om naby aan hom te gaan . . ."

Intussen word die gewone manjifieke Kersversiersels in die res van die kasteel opgesit, ten spyte daarvan dat daar omtrent geen studente is om

dit te geniet nie. Digte rankers van huls en maretakke word al langs die gange gespan en soos gewoonlik staan twaalf Kersbome, skitterend oortrek met goue sterre, in die Groot Saal. 'n Oorweldigende en allerheerlike geur van kos wat berei word, hang in die gange, en teen Kersaand is dit so sterk dat selfs Skille sy neus uit die veiligheid van Ron se sak steek om die lug vol verwagting te besnuif.

Op Kersoggend word Harry wakker toe Ron sy kussing op hom gooi. "Hoe! Presente!"

Harry sit sy bril op en loer deur die skemerdonkerte na die voet van sy bed waar 'n klein hopie pakkies verskyn het. Ron skeur alreeds die papier van sy eie presente af.

"Nog 'n trui van Ma . . . al weer maroen . . . kyk of jy ook een het."

Harry het. Mev. Weasley het vir hom 'n skarlakenrooi trui gestuur met die Griffindorleeu voorop ingebrei, asook 'n dosyn tuisgebakte Kerspaseitjies, 'n stuk Kerskoek en 'n doos met neutkrakeling. Toe hy al hierdie goed eenkant toe stoot, sien hy 'n lang, dun pakkie wat onder alles lê.

"Wat's dit?" sê Ron toe hy soontoe kyk met 'n paar maroen sokkies wat hy so pas oopgemaak het in sy hand.

"Weet nie . . ."

Harry skeur die pakkie oop, en snak na asem toe 'n manjifieke, glansende besemstok daaruit tot op sy bedsprei rol. Ron laat die sokkies val en spring op die bed om dit van naderby te beskou.

"Ek glo dit nie," sê hy skor.

Dit is 'n Vuurslag, identies aan die droombesem waarna Harry elke dag in Diagonaalstraat gaan kyk het. Die steel glinster toe hy dit optel. Hy kan voel hoe dit vibreer en toe hy dit laat los, bly dit sonder enige ondersteuning in die lug op die regte hoogte vir hom hang om op te klim. Sy oë beweeg van die goue registrasienumer boaan die steel na die perfek gladde, vaartbelynde berkehoutakkies in die stert.

"Wie het dit vir jou gestuur?" sê Ron in 'n gedempte stem.

"Kom ons kyk of daar 'n kaart is," sê Harry.

Ron skeur die Vuurslag se geskenkpapier uitmekaar.

"Niks! Vervlaks, wie sal soveel op jou uitgee?"

"Wel," sê Harry oorbluf, "ek wed dit was nie die Dursleys nie."

"Ek wed dit was Dompeldorius," sê Ron wat nou om en om die Vuurslag loop en elke uitsonderlike sentimeter indrink. "Hy het die Onsigbaarheidsmantel anoniem aan jou gestuur . . ."

"Maar dit was my pa s'n," sê Harry. "Dompeldorius het dit net oorgegee aan my. Hy sal nie honderde Galjoene op my uitgee nie. Hy kan nie vir studente sulke goed staan en gee nie –"

"Dis hoekom hy nie sal sê as dit van hom af kom nie!" sê Ron. "Ingeval 'n klein pes soos Malfoy sê hy trek jou voor. Haai, Harry –" Ron skater van die lag, "Malfoy! Wag tot hy jou hierop sien! Hy sal so naars soos 'n

vark wees! Dit is 'n besem van *internasionale* standaard, dis wat!"

"Ek kan dit nie glo nie," mompel Harry en streel oor die Vuurslag terwyl Ron, wat hom so amper slap lag as hy aan Malfoy dink, op Harry se bed neerslaan. "Wie?"

"Ek weet," sê Ron toe hy beheer het oor homself. "Ek weet wie dit kan wees – Lupin!"

"Wat?" sê Harry wat nou ook begin lag het. "Lupin? Luister, as hy so veel goud gehad het, het hy vir homself nuwe klerë gekoop."

"Ja, maar hy hou van jou," sê Ron, "en hy was weg toe jou Nimbus verongeluk het, en hy't dalk daarvan gehoor en besluit om Diagonaalstraat toe te gaan en dit vir jou te kry –"

"Wat bedoel jy hy was weg?" sê Harry. "Hy was siek toe ek in daardie wedstryd gespeel het."

"Wel, hy was nie in die siekeboeg nie," sê Ron. "Ek was daar om die bedpanne skoon te maak vir daardie detensie van Snerp, onthou?"

Harry frons vir Ron.

"Ek kan nie sien hoe Lupin so iets kan bekostig nie."

"Waaroor lag julle twee?"

Hermien het so pas ingekom, nog in haar kamerjas en met Kromskeen in haar arms. Hy het 'n blinkpapierstringetjie om sy nek en lyk baie omgekrap.

"Moet hom nie hierheen bring nie!" sê Ron en gryp Skille haastig vanuit die dieptes van sy bed en druk hom in sy pajamasak. Hermien luister egter nie. Sy laat val vir Kromskeen op Septimus se lee bed en staar oopmond na die Vuurslag.

"Oe, Harry! Wie het dit vir jou gestuur?"

"Weet nie," sê Harry. "Daar was nie 'n kaartjie of iets nie."

Tot sy groot verbasing lyk Hermien glad nie opgewonde of verras deur hierdie nuus nie. Intendeel, haar gesig val en sy byt op haar lip.

"Wat makeer jou?" sê Ron.

"Ek weet nie," sê Hermien stadig, "maar dit is 'n bietjie snaaks, of hoe? Ek bedoel, dit is veronderstel om 'n baie goeie besem te wees, nie waar nie?"

Ron sug geïrriteerd.

"Dis die beste besem wat daar is, Hermien," sê hy.

"Dan is dit seker baie duur . . ."

"Kos waarskynlik meer as al die Slibberins se besems tesame," sê Ron tevrede.

"Wel . . . wie sal vir Harry iets stuur wat so duur is, en dan nie eens vir hom sê van wie dit kom nie?" sê Hermien.

"Wat maak dit tog saak?" sê Ron ongeduldig. "Luister, Harry, kan ek dit uittoets? Kan ek?"

"Ek dink nie iemand moet sommer net op daardie besem ry nie!" sê Hermien skril.

Harry en Ron gaap haar aan.

“Wat stel jy voor moet Harry daarmee doen – die kamer uitvee?” sê Ron.

Voor Hermien kan antwoord, spring Kromskeen van Septimus se bed af tot teen Ron se borskas.

“KRY – HOM – HIER – UIT!” gil Ron terwyl Kromskeen se kloue sy pajamas uitmekaar skeur en Skille wild oor sy skouer probeer ontsnap. Ron gryp Skille aan die stert en skop na Kromskeen, maar dis sleg gemik en hy tref die trommel aan die voetenent van Harry se bed sodat dit omtuimel en Ron uitroep van pyn en op een been op en af spring.

Kromskeen se hare staan skielik orent. ’n Skril, blikkerige gefluit vul die vertrek. Die sakgrootte Kulklikker het uit oom Vernon se ou sokkie geval en is besig om glimmend op die vloer in die rondte te spin.

“Ek het skoon daarvan vergeet!” sê Harry toe hy oorbuk en die Kulklikker optel. “Ek dra daardie sokkies net as ek nie anders kan nie.”

Die Kulklikker spin en fluit in sy handpalm. Kromskeen sis en spoeg daarna.

“Kry daardie kat hier uit, Hermien,” sê Ron ergerlik; hy sit op Harry se bed met sy toon in sy hand. “Kan jy daardie ding nie stil kry nie?” sê hy vir Harry toe Hermien uit die kamer stap terwyl Kromskeen se geel oë nog steeds boosaardig na Ron gluur.

Harry prop die Kulklikker terug in die sokkies en gooi dit in sy trommel. Al wat nou gehoor kan word, is Ron se gedempte kreune van pyn en woede. Skille sit ineengekrimp in Ron se hande. Harry het hom ’n geruime tyd laas buitekant Ron se sak gesien, en is onaangenaam verras om te sien dat Skille, wat altyd so vet was, nou bitter maer is; dit lyk of sy hare kol-kol uitval.

“Hy lyk nie alte goed nie, of hoe?” sê Harry.

“Dis stres!” sê Ron. “Hy sal niks makeer as daardie simpele groot haarbol hom net wil uitlos!”

Harry onthou egter wat die vrou by die Magiese Creature-winkel gesê het oor rotte wat net drie jaar leef, en kan nie anders as om te voel dat, behalwe as Skille magte het wat hy nog nie geopenbaar het nie, hy aan die eindê van sy lewe is. En ten spyte van Ron se gedurige gekla oor Skille wat sowel vervelig as nutteloos is, is hy seker dat Ron baie hartseer sal wees as Skille moet doodgaan.

Daardie oggend is die Kersgees definitief dun gesaai in die Griffindor-geselskamer. Hermien het nou wel vir Kromskeen in haar slaapsaal toegemaak, maar sy is woedend omdat Ron hom probeer skop het; Ron is briesend omdat Kromskeen weer eens probeer het om vir Skille te vang. Harry probeer nie eens meer om hulle met mekaar te laat praat nie, en gee al sy aandag aan die Vuurslag wat hy saam met hom na die geselskamer gebring het. Om een of ander rede krap dit ook vir Hermien om; sy

en niks nie, maar hou aan om skeef na die besem te kyk, asof dit ook oor haar kat gekla het.

Teen etenstyd gaan hulle almal af na die Groot Saal om te vind dat die huistafels weer tot teen die mure gestoot is en dat 'n enkele tafel wat vir twaalf gedek is, in die middel van die vertrek staan. Professors Dompeldorius, McGonagall, Snerp, Spruit en Flickerpitt is daar, tesame met Fil-lis, die opsigter, wat sy gewone bruin baadjie verruil het vir 'n swaelstert-jak wat baie oud en ietwat muf lyk. Daar is net drie ander studente: twee eerstejaars wat bitter senuagtig lyk en 'n nors Slibberin in sy vyfde jaar.

"Geseënde Kersfees!" sê Dompeldorius toe Harry, Ron en Hermien na die tafel stap. "Aangesien daar so min van ons is, is dit 'n bietjie verspot om die huistafels te gebruik . . . Sit, sit!"

Harry, Ron en Hermien gaan sit langs mekaar aan die punt van die ta-fel.

"Klappers!" sê Dompeldorius entoesiasies en bied een ent van 'n groot silwer klapper vir Snerp aan, wat dit onwillig neem en trek. Met 'n ontploffing soos 'n geweeskoot vlieg die klapper oop en hulle sien 'n ge-punte heksehoed met 'n opgestopte aasvoël daarop.

Harry, wat die Boggart onthou, vang Ron se oog en albei van hulle grinnik; Snerp se mond is dun en hy stoot die hoed na Dompeldorius toe wat dit dadelik vir sy eie towenaarshoed verruil.

"Val weg!" sê hy vir die tafel en glimlag breed vir almal.

Terwyl Harry homself aan gebraaide aartappels help, gaan die deure na die Groot Saal weer oop. Dit is professor Trelawney wat na hulle toe gly soos een wat op wiele is. Sy het 'n groen rok met blinkertjies vir die ge-leentheid aangetrek, en dit laat haar nog meer soos 'n oorgroot, glinsterende naaldekker lyk.

"Sybill, dit is 'n aangename verrassing!" sê Dompeldorius toe hy op-staan.

"Ek het die kristal bestudeer, meneer die Hoof," sê professor Trelaw-ney in haar mistigste en mees veraf stem, "en tot my verbasing het ek ge-sien hoe ek my afgesonderde middagete prysgee en by julle aansluit. Wie is ek om nie die stem van die noodlot te gehoorsaam nie? Ek het my da-delik uit my toring hierheen gehaas, en ek smeeek u om my te vergewe dat ek so laat is . . ."

"Sekerlik, sekerlik," sê Dompeldorius en sy oë vonkel. "Laat ek 'n stoel vir jou nader trek –"

En hy trek sowaar met sy towerstaf 'n stoel in die lug nader, wat 'n paar keer in die rondte tol voor dit met 'n doef tussen professors Snerp en Mc-Gonagall land. Professor Trelawney gaan egter nie sit nie; haar enorme oë dwaal oor die tafel, en sy uiter skielik 'n sagte soort gillettjie.

"Ek durf nie, meneer die Hoof! As ek by die tafel sou aansluit, sal ons dertien wees! Niks kan meer ongelukkig as dit wees nie! Moet nooit ver-

geet dat waar dertien saam eet, die een wat eerste opstaan ook eerste sal sterf!”

“Ons sal die kans waag, Sybill,” sê professor McGonagall ongeduldig. “Sit tog, die kalkoen is besig om yskoud te word.”

Professor Trelawney aarsel, dan gaan sit sy op die leë stoel. Haar oë is toe en haar lippe is op mekaar gepers asof sy verwag dat ’n bliksemstraal die tafel gaan tref. Professor McGonagall krap met ’n groot skeplepel in die naaste opskepskottel.

“Afval, Sybill?”

Professor Trelawney ignoreer haar. Met wydoop oë kyk sy om haar en sê, “Maar waar is die liewe professor Lupin dan?”

“Ek is bevrees die stomme man is al weer siek,” sê Dompeldorius en wys dat almal hulself moet help. “Dis baie jammer dat dit nou juis op Kersdag moet gebeur.”

“Maar weet jy dit dan nie reeds nie, Sybill?” sê professor McGonagall met opgetrekte wenkbroue.

Professor Trelawney gee professor McGonagall ’n baie koue kyk.

“Sekerlik weet ek dit, Minerva,” sê sy sag, “maar ’n mens loop nie te koop met die feit dat jy Alwetend is nie. Ek gee dikwels voor dat ek nie oor die Alsiende Oog beskik nie, net om andere nie te ontstel nie.”

“Dit verduidelik baie dinge,” sê professor McGonagall bitsig.

Professor Trelawney se stem is skielik baie minder mistig.

“As jy dan moet weet, Minerva, ek het al lankal gesten dat die arme professor Lupin nie meer lank met ons gaan wees nie. Soos ek, lyk dit of hy self daarvan bewus is dat sy tyd kort is. Hy het voet in die wind geslaan toe ek aangebied het om sy toekoms in die kristalbal te lees —”

“Bid jou aan,” sê professor McGonagall droogweg.

“Ek twyfel,” sê Dompeldorius in ’n vrolike maar ietwat harde stem, wat ’n einde maak aan professor McGonagall en professor Trelawney se gesprek, “of professor Lupin in onmiddellike gevaar is. Severus, het jy weer die Towerdrankie vir hom gemaak?”

“Ja, meneer die Hoof,” sê Snerp.

“Goed,” sê Dompeldorius. “Dan sal hy binnekort weer op die been wees. . . . Derek, het jy al ’n paar van die chipolatas gehad? Hulle is heerlik.”

Die eerstejaarseun wat direk deur Dompeldorius aangespreek is, word bloedrooi en neem die bord worsies met bewende hande.

Professor Trelawney tree amper normaal op tot aan die einde van die Kersete, twee uur later. Toe Harry en Ron, tot barstens toe vol van die Kersete en met hul klapperhoede nog steeds op hul koppe, eerste van die tafel af opstaan, roep sy hard uit.

“My engele! Wie van julle het eerste opgestaan? Wie?”

“Weet nie,” sê Ron en kyk ongemaklik na Harry.

“Ek twyfel of dit enigsin saak maak,” sê professor McGonagall koudweg, “behalwe as ’n mal man met ’n byl voor die deur staan en wag om die een wat eerste in die ingangsportaal kom, te verbrysel.”

Selfs Ron lag. Professor Trelawney lyk hoogs verontwaardig.

“Kom jy?” sê Harry vir Hermien.

“Nee,” mompel Hermien. “Ek wil gou iets vir professor McGonagall sê.”

“Wil seker hoor of sy nog meer klasse kan bywoon,” sê Ron gapend toe hulle na die ingangsportaal stap waar daar absoluut geen mal mense met byle is nie.

Toe hulle by die portretopening kom, is sir Cadogan besig met ’n Kersparty vir ’n paar monnike, verskeie vorige hoofde van Hogwarts en sy vet ponie. Hy stoot sy visier op en drink hul gesondheid met ’n fles heuningwyn.

“Geseënde – hik – Kersfees! Wagwoord!”

“Smerige skobbejak,” sê Ron.

“En vir jou ook, meneer!” brul sir Cadogan terwyl die skildery vorentoe swaai sodat hulle kan deurklim.

Harry gaan reguit na die slaapsaal, gaan haal sy Vuurslag en die Besemstok Versienstel wat Hermien vir hom vir sy verjaardag gegee het, neem dit ondertoe en doen sy bes om iets te kry om aan die Vuurslag te doen; daar is egter geen gebuigde takkies om uit te knip nie, en die steel blink reeds so dat dit sinneloos is om dit te poleer. Hy en Ron kan dit net bewonderend vanuit elke hoek aangaap toe die portretopening oopgaan en Hermien inkom, gevolg deur professor McGonagall.

Hoewel professor McGonagall die hoof van Griffindorhuis is, het Harry haar nog net een keer vantevore in die geselskamer gesien, en dit was toe sy ’n baie ernstige aankondiging moes doen. Hy en Ron staar na haar terwyl albei van hulle die Vuurslag vashou. Hermien loop agterom hulle, gaan sit, tel die naaste boek op en steek haar gesig daarin weg.

“So, dit is dan dit?” sê professor McGonagall die ene kraalogies, terwyl sy na die kaggel stap en na die Vuurslag kyk. “Juffrou La Grange het so pas vir my gesê dat iemand vir jou ’n besemstok gestuur het, Potter.”

Harry en Ron kyk om na Hermien. Hulle sien hoe haar voorkop rooi word bo die boek wat sy onderstebo vashou.

“Mag ek?” vra professor McGonagall, maar sy wag nie vir ’n antwoord voor sy die Vuurslag uit hul hande vat nie. Sy bekyk dit sorgvuldig van die punt van die steel tot by die stert se takkies. “H’m. En daar was geen nota nie, Potter? Geen kaart? Geen boodskap van enige aard nie?”

“Nee,” sê Harry beteuterd.

“Ek sien . . .” sê professor McGonagall. “Wel, ek is bevrees ek sal dit moet verwyder, Potter.”

“W-wat?” sê Harry en skarrel orent. “Hoekom?”

“Ek moet dit laat nagaan vir vloeke,” sê professor McGonagall. “Ek is natuurlik geen ekspert nie, maar ek veronderstel dat Madame Hooch en professor Flickerpitt dit kan aftakel en —”

“Aftakel?” herhaal Ron asof professor McGonagall van haar sinne beroof is.

“Dit sal nie langer as ’n paar weke neem nie,” sê professor McGonagall. “Jy sal dit terugkry sodra ons seker is dat daar geen vloeke op is nie.”

“Dit makeer niks!” sê Harry en sy stem bewe effens. “Regtig, professor —”

“Daarvan kan jy nie seker wees nie, Potter,” sê professor McGonagall heeltemal vriendelik, “voor jy nie daarop gevlieg het nie, en ek is bevrees dat dit buite die kwessie is tot ons oortuig is dat niemand daarmee gepeuter het nie. Ek sal jou op hoogte hou.”

Professor McGonagall draai op haar hak en neem die Vuurslag saam met haar deur die portretopening, wat agter haar toegaan. Harry staan haar agterna, die blikkie met Hoëglanspolitoer nog steeds in sy hande. Ron vlieg egter vir Hermien in.

“Vir wat staan en hardloop jy na McGonagall?”

Hermien gooi haar boek opsy. Sy is nog steeds pienk in die gesig, maar sy staan op en kyk uitdagend na Ron.

“Omdat ek dink — en professor McGonagall stem met my saam — dat daardie besem na alle waarskynlikheid deur Sirius Swardt aan Harry gestuur is!”

CHAPTER TWELVE



THE PATRONUS

Harry knew that Hermione had meant well, but that didn't stop him from being angry with her. He had been the owner of the best broom in the world for a few short hours, and now, because of her interference, he didn't know whether he would ever see it again. He was positive that there was nothing wrong with the Firebolt now, but what sort of state would it be in once it had been subjected to all sorts of anti-jinx tests?

Ron was furious with Hermione too. As far as he was concerned, the stripping-down of a brand-new Firebolt was nothing less than criminal damage. Hermione, who remained convinced that she had acted for the best, started avoiding the common room. Harry and Ron supposed she had taken refuge in the library and didn't try to

persuade her to come back. All in all, they were glad when the rest of the school returned shortly after New Year, and Gryffindor Tower became crowded and noisy again.

Wood sought Harry out on the night before term started.

“Had a good Christmas?” he said, and then, without waiting for an answer, he sat down, lowered his voice, and said, “I’ve been doing some thinking over Christmas, Harry. After the last match, you know. If the dementors come to the next one . . . I mean . . . we can’t afford you to — well —”

Wood broke off, looking awkward.

“I’m working on it,” said Harry quickly. “Professor Lupin said he’d train me to ward off the dementors. We should be starting this week. He said he’d have time after Christmas.”

“Ah,” said Wood, his expression clearing. “Well, in that case — I really didn’t want to lose you as Seeker, Harry. And have you ordered a new broom yet?”

“No,” said Harry.

“What! You’d better get a move on, you know — you can’t ride that Shooting Star against Ravenclaw!”

“He got a Firebolt for Christmas,” said Ron.

“A *Firebolt*? No! Seriously? A — a real *Firebolt*?”

“Don’t get excited, Oliver,” said Harry gloomily. “I haven’t got it anymore. It was confiscated.” And he explained all about how the Firebolt was now being checked for jinxes.

“Jinxed? How could it be jinxed?”

“Sirius Black,” Harry said wearily. “He’s supposed to be after me. So McGonagall reckons he might have sent it.”

Waving aside the information that a famous murderer was after his Seeker, Wood said, "But Black couldn't have bought a Firebolt! He's on the run! The whole country's on the lookout for him! How could he just walk into Quality Quidditch Supplies and buy a broomstick?"

"I know," said Harry, "but McGonagall still wants to strip it down —"

Wood went pale.

"I'll go and talk to her, Harry," he promised. "I'll make her see reason . . . A Firebolt . . . a real Firebolt, on our team . . . She wants Gryffindor to win as much as we do . . . I'll make her see sense. A *Firebolt* . . ."

Classes started again the next day. The last thing anyone felt like doing was spending two hours on the grounds on a raw January morning, but Hagrid had provided a bonfire full of salamanders for their enjoyment, and they spent an unusually good lesson collecting dry wood and leaves to keep the fire blazing while the flame-loving lizards scampered up and down the crumbling, white-hot logs. The first Divination lesson of the new term was much less fun; Professor Trelawney was now teaching them palmistry, and she lost no time in informing Harry that he had the shortest life line she had ever seen.

It was Defense Against the Dark Arts that Harry was keen to get to; after his conversation with Wood, he wanted to get started on his anti-dementor lessons as soon as possible.

"Ah yes," said Lupin, when Harry reminded him of his promise at the end of class. "Let me see . . . how about eight o'clock on Thursday evening? The History of Magic classroom should be large

enough. . . . I'll have to think carefully about how we're going to do this. . . . We can't bring a real dementor into the castle to practice on. . . ."

"Still looks ill, doesn't he?" said Ron as they walked down the corridor, heading to dinner. "What d'you reckon's the matter with him?"

There was a loud and impatient "tuh" from behind them. It was Hermione, who had been sitting at the feet of a suit of armor, repacking her bag, which was so full of books it wouldn't close.

"And what are you tutting at us for?" said Ron irritably.

"Nothing," said Hermione in a lofty voice, heaving her bag back over her shoulder.

"Yes, you were," said Ron. "I said I wonder what's wrong with Lupin, and you —"

"Well, isn't it *obvious*?" said Hermione, with a look of maddening superiority.

"If you don't want to tell us, don't," snapped Ron.

"Fine," said Hermione haughtily, and she marched off.

"She doesn't know," said Ron, staring resentfully after Hermione. "She's just trying to get us to talk to her again."

At eight o'clock on Thursday evening, Harry left Gryffindor Tower for the History of Magic classroom. It was dark and empty when he arrived, but he lit the lamps with his wand and had waited only five minutes when Professor Lupin turned up, carrying a large packing case, which he heaved onto Professor Binns's desk.

"What's that?" said Harry.

“Another boggart,” said Lupin, stripping off his cloak. “I’ve been combing the castle ever since Tuesday, and very luckily, I found this one lurking inside Mr. Filch’s filing cabinet. It’s the nearest we’ll get to a real dementor. The boggart will turn into a dementor when he sees you, so we’ll be able to practice on him. I can store him in my office when we’re not using him; there’s a cupboard under my desk he’ll like.”

“Okay,” said Harry, trying to sound as though he wasn’t apprehensive at all and merely glad that Lupin had found such a good substitute for a real dementor.

“So . . .” Professor Lupin had taken out his own wand, and indicated that Harry should do the same. “The spell I am going to try and teach you is highly advanced magic, Harry — well beyond Ordinary Wizarding Level. It is called the Patronus Charm.”

“How does it work?” said Harry nervously.

“Well, when it works correctly, it conjures up a Patronus,” said Lupin, “which is a kind of anti-dementor — a guardian that acts as a shield between you and the dementor.”

Harry had a sudden vision of himself crouching behind a Hagrid-sized figure holding a large club. Professor Lupin continued, “The Patronus is a kind of positive force, a projection of the very things that the dementor feeds upon — hope, happiness, the desire to survive — but it cannot feel despair, as real humans can, so the dementors can’t hurt it. But I must warn you, Harry, that the charm might be too advanced for you. Many qualified wizards have difficulty with it.”

“What does a Patronus look like?” said Harry curiously.

“Each one is unique to the wizard who conjures it.”

“And how do you conjure it?”

“With an incantation, which will work only if you are concentrating, with all your might, on a single, very happy memory.”

Harry cast his mind about for a happy memory. Certainly, nothing that had happened to him at the Dursleys’ was going to do. Finally, he settled on the moment when he had first ridden a broomstick.

“Right,” he said, trying to recall as exactly as possible the wonderful, soaring sensation of his stomach.

“The incantation is this —” Lupin cleared his throat. “*Expecto Patronum!*”

“*Expecto Patronum,*” Harry repeated under his breath. “*Expecto Patronum.*”

“Concentrating hard on your happy memory?”

“Oh — yeah —” said Harry, quickly forcing his thoughts back to that first broom ride. “*Expecto Patrono* — no, *Patronum* — sorry — *Expecto Patronum, Expecto Patronum* —”

Something whooshed suddenly out of the end of his wand; it looked like a wisp of silvery gas.

“Did you see that?” said Harry excitedly. “Something happened!”

“Very good,” said Lupin, smiling. “Right, then — ready to try it on a dementor?”

“Yes,” Harry said, gripping his wand very tightly, and moving into the middle of the deserted classroom. He tried to keep his mind on flying, but something else kept intruding . . . Any second now, he might hear his mother again . . . but he shouldn’t think that, or he *would* hear her again, and he didn’t want to . . . or did he?

Lupin grasped the lid of the packing case and pulled.

A dementor rose slowly from the box, its hooded face turned toward Harry, one glistening, scabbed hand gripping its cloak. The lamps around the classroom flickered and went out. The dementor stepped from the box and started to sweep silently toward Harry, drawing a deep, rattling breath. A wave of piercing cold broke over him —

“Expecto Patronum!” Harry yelled. *“Expecto Patronum! Expecto*
—”

But the classroom and the dementor were dissolving. . . . Harry was falling again through thick white fog, and his mother’s voice was louder than ever, echoing inside his head — *“Not Harry! Not Harry! Please — I’ll do anything —”*

“Stand aside. Stand aside, girl!”

“Harry!”

Harry jerked back to life. He was lying flat on his back on the floor. The classroom lamps were alight again. He didn’t have to ask what had happened.

“Sorry,” he muttered, sitting up and feeling cold sweat trickling down behind his glasses.

“Are you all right?” said Lupin.

“Yes . . .” Harry pulled himself up on one of the desks and leaned against it.

“Here —” Lupin handed him a Chocolate Frog. “Eat this before we try again. I didn’t expect you to do it your first time; in fact, I would have been astounded if you had.”

“It’s getting worse,” Harry muttered, biting off the Frog’s head. “I

could hear her louder that time — and him — Voldemort —”

Lupin looked paler than usual.

“Harry, if you don’t want to continue, I will more than understand —”

“I do!” said Harry fiercely, stuffing the rest of the Chocolate Frog into his mouth. “I’ve got to! What if the dementors turn up at our match against Ravenclaw? I can’t afford to fall off again. If we lose this game we’ve lost the Quidditch Cup!”

“All right then . . .,” said Lupin. “You might want to select another memory, a happy memory, I mean, to concentrate on. . . . That one doesn’t seem to have been strong enough . . .”

Harry thought hard and decided his feelings when Gryffindor had won the House Championship last year had definitely qualified as very happy. He gripped his wand tightly again and took up his position in the middle of the classroom.

“Ready?” said Lupin, gripping the box lid.

“Ready,” said Harry, trying hard to fill his head with happy thoughts about Gryffindor winning, and not dark thoughts about what was going to happen when the box opened.

“Go!” said Lupin, pulling off the lid. The room went icily cold and dark once more. The dementor glided forward, drawing its breath, one rotting hand was extending toward Harry —

“*Expecto Patronum!*” Harry yelled. “*Expecto Patronum! Expecto Pat —*”

White fog obscured his senses . . . big, blurred shapes were moving around him . . . then came a new voice, a man’s voice, shouting, panicking —

“Lily, take Harry and go! It’s him! Go! Run! I’ll hold him off =”

The sounds of someone stumbling from a room — a door bursting open — a cackle of high-pitched laughter —

“Harry! Harry . . . wake up. . . ”

Lupin was tapping Harry hard on the face. This time it was a minute before Harry understood why he was lying on a dusty classroom floor.

“I heard my dad,” Harry mumbled. “That’s the first time I’ve ever heard him — he tried to take on Voldemort himself, to give my mum time to run for it. . . .”

Harry suddenly realized that there were tears on his face mingling with the sweat. He bent his face as low as possible, wiping them off on his robes, pretending to do up his shoelace, so that Lupin wouldn’t see.

“You heard James?” said Lupin in a strange voice.

“Yeah . . .” Face dry, Harry looked up. “Why — you didn’t know my dad, did you?”

“I — I did, as a matter of fact,” said Lupin. “We were friends at Hogwarts. Listen, Harry — perhaps we should leave it here for tonight. This charm is ridiculously advanced. . . . I shouldn’t have suggested putting you through this. . . .”

“No!” said Harry. He got up again. “I’ll have one more go! I’m not thinking of happy enough things, that’s what it is. . . . Hang on. . . .”

He racked his brains. A really, really happy memory . . . one that he could turn into a good, strong Patronus . . .

The moment when he’d first found out he was a wizard, and would be leaving the Dursleys for Hogwarts! If that wasn’t a happy memory,

he didn't know what was. . . . Concentrating very hard on how he had felt when he'd realized he'd be leaving Privet Drive, Harry got to his feet and faced the packing case once more.

"Ready?" said Lupin, who looked as though he were doing this against his better judgment. "Concentrating hard? All right — go!"

He pulled off the lid of the case for the third time, and the dementor rose out of it; the room fell cold and dark —

"EXPECTO PATRONUM!" Harry bellowed. *"EXPECTO PATRONUM! EXPECTO PATRONUM!"*

The screaming inside Harry's head had started again — except this time, it sounded as though it were coming from a badly tuned radio — softer and louder and softer again — and he could still see the dementor — it had halted — and then a huge, silver shadow came bursting out of the end of Harry's wand, to hover between him and the dementor, and though Harry's legs felt like water, he was still on his feet — though for how much longer, he wasn't sure —

"Riddikulus!" roared Lupin, springing forward.

There was a loud crack, and Harry's cloudy Patronus vanished along with the dementor; he sank into a chair, feeling as exhausted as if he'd just run a mile, and felt his legs shaking. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Professor Lupin forcing the boggart back into the packing case with his wand; it had turned into a silvery orb again.

"Excellent!" Lupin said, striding over to where Harry sat. "Excellent, Harry! That was definitely a start!"

"Can we have another go? Just one more go?"

"Not now," said Lupin firmly. "You've had enough for one night. Here —"

He handed Harry a large bar of Honeydukes's best chocolate.

"Eat the lot, or Madam Pomfrey will be after my blood. Same time next week?"

"Okay," said Harry. He took a bite of the chocolate and watched Lupin extinguishing the lamps that had rekindled with the disappearance of the dementor. A thought had just occurred to him.

"Professor Lupin?" he said. "If you knew my dad, you must've known Sirius Black as well."

Lupin turned very quickly.

"What gives you that idea?" he said sharply.

"Nothing — I mean, I just knew they were friends at Hogwarts too."

Lupin's face relaxed.

"Yes, I knew him," he said shortly. "Or I thought I did. You'd better be off, Harry, it's getting late."

Harry left the classroom, walking along the corridor and around a corner, then took a detour behind a suit of armor and sank down on its plinth to finish his chocolate, wishing he hadn't mentioned Black, as Lupin was obviously not keen on the subject. Then Harry's thoughts wandered back to his mother and father.

He felt drained and strangely empty, even though he was so full of chocolate. Terrible though it was to hear his parents' last moments replayed inside his head, these were the only times Harry had heard their voices since he was a very small child. But he'd never be able to produce a proper Patronus if he half wanted to hear his parents again. . . .

"They're dead," he told himself sternly. "They're dead and

listening to echoes of them won't bring them back. You'd better get a grip on yourself if you want that Quidditch Cup."

He stood up, crammed the last bit of chocolate into his mouth, and headed back to Gryffindor Tower.

Ravenclaw played Slytherin a week after the start of term. Slytherin won, though narrowly. According to Wood, this was good news for Gryffindor, who would take second place if they beat Ravenclaw too. He therefore increased the number of team practices to five a week. This meant that with Lupin's anti-dementor classes, which in themselves were more draining than six Quidditch practices, Harry had just one night a week to do all his homework. Even so, he wasn't showing the strain nearly as much as Hermione, whose immense workload finally seemed to be getting to her. Every night, without fail, Hermione was to be seen in a corner of the common room, several tables spread with books, Arithmancy charts, rune dictionaries, diagrams of Muggles lifting heavy objects, and file upon file of extensive notes; she barely spoke to anybody and snapped when she was interrupted.

"How's she doing it?" Ron muttered to Harry one evening as Harry sat finishing a nasty essay on Undetectable Poisons for Snape. Harry looked up. Hermione was barely visible behind a tottering pile of books.

"Doing what?"

"Getting to all her classes!" Ron said. "I heard her talking to Professor Vector, that Arithmancy witch, this morning. They were going on about yesterday's lesson, but Hermione can't've been there,

because she was with us in Care of Magical Creatures! And Ernie Macmillan told me she's never missed a Muggle Studies class, but half of them are at the same time as Divination, and she's never missed one of them either!"

Harry didn't have time to fathom the mystery of Hermione's impossible schedule at the moment; he really needed to get on with Snape's essay. Two seconds later, however, he was interrupted again, this time by Wood.

"Bad news, Harry. I've just been to see Professor McGonagall about the Firebolt. She — er — got a bit *shirty* with me. Told me I'd got my priorities wrong. Seemed to think I cared more about winning the Cup than I do about you staying alive. Just because I told her I didn't care if it threw you off, as long as you caught the Snitch first." Wood shook his head in disbelief. "Honestly, the way she was yelling at me . . . you'd think I'd said something terrible. . . . Then I asked her how much longer she was going to keep it. . . ." He screwed up his face and imitated Professor McGonagall's severe voice. "'As long as necessary, Wood?' . . . I reckon it's time you ordered a new broom, Harry. There's an order form at the back of *Which Broomstick* . . . you could get a Nimbus Two Thousand and One, like Malfoy's got."

"I'm not buying anything Malfoy thinks is good," said Harry flatly.

January faded imperceptibly into February, with no change in the bitterly cold weather. The match against Ravenclaw was drawing nearer and nearer, but Harry still hadn't ordered a new broom. He was now asking Professor McGonagall for news of the Firebolt after every Transfiguration lesson, Ron standing hopefully at his shoulder,

Hermione rushing past with her face averted.

“No, Potter, you can’t have it back yet,” Professor McGonagall told him the twelfth time this happened, before he’d even opened his mouth. “We’ve checked for most of the usual curses, but Professor Flitwick believes the broom might be carrying a Hurling Hex. I shall *tell* you once we’ve finished checking it. Now, please stop badgering me.”

To make matters even worse, Harry’s anti-dementor lessons were not going nearly as well as he had hoped. Several sessions on, he was able to produce an indistinct, silvery shadow every time the boggart-dementor approached him, but his Patronus was too feeble to drive the dementor away. All it did was hover, like a semi-transparent cloud, draining Harry of energy as he fought to keep it there. Harry felt angry with himself, guilty about his secret desire to hear his parents’ voices again.

“You’re expecting too much of yourself,” said Professor Lupin sternly in their fourth week of practice. “For a thirteen-year-old wizard, even an indistinct Patronus is a huge achievement. You aren’t passing out anymore, are you?”

“I thought a Patronus would — charge the dementors down or something,” said Harry dispiritedly. “Make them disappear —”

“The true Patronus does do that,” said Lupin. “But you’ve achieved a great deal in a very short space of time. If the dementors put in an appearance at your next Quidditch match, you will be able to keep them at bay long enough to get back to the ground.”

“You said it’s harder if there are loads of them,” said Harry.

“I have complete confidence in you,” said Lupin, smiling. “Here

— you've earned a drink — something from the Three Broomsticks. You won't have tried it before —”

He pulled two bottles out of his briefcase.

“Butterbeer!” said Harry, without thinking. “Yeah, I like that stuff!”

Lupin raised an eyebrow.

“Oh — Ron and Hermione brought me some back from Hogsmeade,” Harry lied quickly.

“I see,” said Lupin, though he still looked slightly suspicious. “Well — let's drink to a Gryffindor victory against Ravenclaw! Not that I'm supposed to take sides, as a teacher . . .,” he added hastily.

They drank the butterbeer in silence, until Harry voiced something he'd been wondering for a while.

“What's under a dementor's hood?”

Professor Lupin lowered his bottle thoughtfully.

“Hmmm . . . well, the only people who really know are in no condition to tell us. You see, the dementor lowers its hood only to use its last and worst weapon.”

“What's that?”

“They call it the Dementor's Kiss,” said Lupin, with a slightly twisted smile. “It's what dementors do to those they wish to destroy utterly. I suppose there must be some kind of mouth under there, because they clamp their jaws upon the mouth of the victim and — and suck out his soul.”

Harry accidentally spat out a bit of butterbeer.

“What — they kill — ?”

“Oh no,” said Lupin. “Much worse than that. You can exist without

your soul, you know, as long as your brain and heart are still working. But you'll have no sense of self anymore, no memory, no . . . anything. There's no chance at all of recovery. You'll just — exist. As an empty shell. And your soul is gone forever . . . lost.”

Lupin drank a little more butterbeer, then said, “It’s the fate that awaits Sirius Black. It was in the *Daily Prophet* this morning. The Ministry have given the dementors permission to perform it if they find him.”

Harry sat stunned for a moment at the idea of someone having their soul sucked out through their mouth. But then he thought of Black.

“He deserves it,” he said suddenly.

“You think so?” said Lupin lightly. “Do you really think anyone deserves that?”

“Yes,” said Harry defiantly. “For . . . for some things . . .”

He would have liked to have told Lupin about the conversation he’d overheard about Black in the Three Broomsticks, about Black betraying his mother and father, but it would have involved revealing that he’d gone to Hogsmeade without permission, and he knew Lupin wouldn’t be very impressed by that. So he finished his butterbeer, thanked Lupin, and left the History of Magic classroom.

Harry half wished that he hadn’t asked what was under a dementor’s hood, the answer had been so horrible, and he was so lost in unpleasant thoughts of what it would feel like to have your soul sucked out of you that he walked headlong into Professor McGonagall halfway up the stairs.

“Do watch where you’re going, Potter!”

“Sorry, Professor —”

"I've just been looking for you in the Gryffindor common room. Well, here it is, we've done everything we could think of, and there doesn't seem to be anything wrong with it at all. You've got a very good friend somewhere, Potter. . . ."

Harry's jaw dropped. She was holding out his Firebolt, and it looked as magnificent as ever.

"I can have it back?" Harry said weakly. "Seriously?"

"Seriously," said Professor McGonagall, and she was actually smiling. "I daresay you'll need to get the feel of it before Saturday's match, won't you? And Potter — *do* try and win, won't you? Or we'll be out of the running for the eighth year in a row, as Professor Snape was kind enough to remind me only last night. . . ."

Speechless, Harry carried the Firebolt back upstairs toward Gryffindor Tower. As he turned a corner, he saw Ron dashing toward him, grinning from ear to ear.

"She gave it to you? Excellent! Listen, can I still have a go on it? Tomorrow?"

"Yeah . . . anything . . . ," said Harry, his heart lighter than it had been in a month. "You know what — we should make up with Hermione. . . . She was only trying to help. . . ."

"Yeah, all right," said Ron. "She's in the common room now — working, for a change —"

They turned into the corridor to Gryffindor Tower and saw Neville Longbottom, pleading with Sir Cadogan, who seemed to be refusing him entrance.

"I wrote them down!" Neville was saying tearfully. "But I must've dropped them somewhere!"

“A likely tale!” roared Sir Cadogan. Then, spotting Harry and Ron: “Good even, my fine young yeomen! Come clap this loon in irons. He is trying to force entry to the chambers within!”

“Oh, shut up,” said Ron as he and Harry drew level with Neville.

“I’ve lost the passwords!” Neville told them miserably. “I made him tell me what passwords he was going to use this week, because he keeps changing them, and now I don’t know what I’ve done with them!”

“Oddsbodikins,” said Harry to Sir Cadogan, who looked extremely disappointed and reluctantly swung forward to let them into the common room. There was a sudden, excited murmur as every head turned and the next moment, Harry was surrounded by people exclaiming over his Firebolt.

“Where’d you get it, Harry?”

“Will you let me have a go?”

“Have you ridden it yet, Harry?”

“Ravenclaw’ll have no chance, they’re all on Cleansweep Sevens!”

“Can I just *hold* it, Harry?”

After ten minutes or so, during which the Firebolt was passed around and admired from every angle, the crowd dispersed and Harry and Ron had a clear view of Hermione, the only person who hadn’t rushed over to them, bent over her work and carefully avoiding their eyes. Harry and Ron approached her table and at last, she looked up.

“I got it back,” said Harry, grinning at her and holding up the Firebolt.

“See, Hermione? There wasn’t anything wrong with it!” said Ron.

“Well — there *might* have been!” said Hermione. “I mean, at least you know now that it’s safe!”

“Yeah, I suppose so,” said Harry. “I’d better put it upstairs —”

“I’ll take it!” said Ron eagerly. “I’ve got to give Scabbers his rat tonic.”

He took the Firebolt and, holding it as if it were made of glass, carried it away up the boys’ staircase.

“Can I sit down, then?” Harry asked Hermione.

“I suppose so,” said Hermione, moving a great stack of parchment off a chair.

Harry looked around at the cluttered table, at the long Arithmancy essay on which the ink was still glistening, at the even longer Muggle Studies essay (“Explain Why Muggles Need Electricity”), and at the rune translation Hermione was now poring over.

“How are you getting through all this stuff?” Harry asked her.

“Oh, well — you know — working hard,” said Hermione. Close-up, Harry saw that she looked almost as tired as Lupin.

“Why don’t you just drop a couple of subjects?” Harry asked, watching her lifting books as she searched for her rune dictionary.

“I couldn’t do that!” said Hermione, looking scandalized.

“Arithmancy looks terrible,” said Harry, picking up a very complicated-looking number chart.

“Oh no, it’s wonderful!” said Hermione earnestly. “It’s my favorite subject! It’s —”

But exactly what was wonderful about Arithmancy, Harry never

found out. At that precise moment, a strangled yell echoed down the boys' staircase. The whole common room fell silent, staring, petrified, at the entrance. Then came hurried footsteps, growing louder and louder — and then Ron came leaping into view, dragging with him a bedsheet.

“LOOK!” he bellowed, striding over to Hermione's table. “LOOK!” he yelled, shaking the sheets in her face.

“Ron, what — ?”

“SCABBERS! LOOK! SCABBERS!”

Hermione was leaning away from Ron, looking utterly bewildered. Harry looked down at the sheet Ron was holding. There was something red on it. Something that looked horribly like —

“BLOOD!” Ron yelled into the stunned silence. “HE'S GONE! AND YOU KNOW WHAT WAS ON THE FLOOR?”

“N-no,” said Hermione in a trembling voice.

Ron threw something down onto Hermione's rune translation. Hermione and Harry leaned forward. Lying on top of the weird, spiky shapes were several long, ginger cat hairs.

Die Patronus

Harry weet dat Hermien dit goed bedoel, maar dit beteken nie dat hy nie vir haar kwaad is nie. Vir 'n paar kort ure was hy die eienaar van die beste besem in die wêreld, en nou, omdat sy ingemeng het, weet hy nie of hy dit ooit weer gaan sien nie. Hy is vas oortuig dat daar niks met die Vuurslag skort nie, maar in watter toestand gaan dit wees nadat dit aan allerhande antivloektoetse onderwerp is?

Ron is ook smoorkwaad vir Hermien. Wat hom betref, is dit krimineel om 'n splinternuwe Vuurslag te wil aftakel. Hermien, wat egter vas oortuig is dat sy die regte ding gedoen het, begin om die geselskamer te vermy. Harry en Ron reken dat sy haar toevlug tot die biblioteek geneem het en probeer haar nie oorreed om terug te kom nie. Hulle is verlig dat die res van die skool binnekort weer terug sal wees vir Nuwejaar, en dat die Griffindortoring weer stampvol en raserig sal wees.

Die aand voor die begin van die kwartaal soek Wood vir Harry op.

"Het jy lekker Kersfees gehou?" vra hy en toe, sonder om vir 'n antwoord te wag, laat sak hy sy stem en sê, "Ek het heelwat gedink tydens die vakansie, Harry. Na die laaste wedstryd, sien. As die Dementors na die volgende een kom . . . ek bedoel . . . ons kan nie bekostig dat jy – wel –"

Wood bly stil en lyk ongemaklik.

"Ek werk daaraan," sê Harry vinnig. "Professor Lupin het gesê hy sal my wys hoe om die Dementors af te weer. Ons gaan hierdie week begin; hy't gesê hy sal na Kersfees tyd hê."

"Aha," sê Wood en sy gesig helder op. "Wel, in daardie geval – ek wil jou regtig nie verloor as Soeker nie, Harry. Het jy al 'n nuwe besem bestel?"

"Nee," sê Harry.

"Wat! Jy beter opskud, weet jy – jy kan nie teen Raweklou op daardie Shooting Star ry nie!"

"Hy het 'n Vuurslag vir Kersfees gekry," sê Ron.

"'n Vuurslag? Nee! Ernstig? 'n – 'n Regte Vuurslag?"

"Moenie opgewonde raak nie, Oliver," sê Harry somber. "Ek het dit nie meer nie. Dis gekonfiskeer." Hy verduidelik volledig hoe die Vuurslag op die oomblik vir vloekte getoets word.

“Vervloek? Hoekom sal dit ’n vloek op hê?”

“Sirius Swardt,” sê Harry moeg. “Hy’s glo agter my aan. McGonagall reken hy het dit dalk gestuur.”

Wood steur hom min aan die inligting dat ’n berugte moordenaar agter sy Soeker aan is en sê, “Maar Swardt kon nie ’n Vuurslag gekoop het nie! Hy’s op vlug! Die hele land is op die uitkyk vir hom! Hoe kan hy sommer net by Kwaliteit Kwiddiek-toebehore wil instap en ’n besemstok staan en koop?”

“Ek weet,” sê Harry, “maar McGonagall wil dit nog steeds aftakel –”

Wood word bleek.

“Ek sal met haar gaan praat, Harry,” belowe hy. “Ek sal haar rede laat sien . . . ’n Vuurslag . . . ’n regte Vuurslag in ons span . . . sy wil net so graag hê dat Griffindor moet wen as ons . . . ek sal haar rede laat verstaan . . . ’n Vuurslag . . .”

Die volgende dag begin die klasse weer. Die laaste ding waarvoor enig- een lus is, is om twee uur lank, op ’n koue oggend in Januarie, op die terrein deur te bring, maar Hagrid het ’n groot vuur vol salamanders vir hul plesier gemaak, en hulle het ’n buitengewoon lekker les waartydens hulle droë hout en blare optel om die vuur mee te stook, terwyl die vuur- liewende reptiele op en af oor die verkrummelende, witwarm kole skar- rel. Die eerste Waarsêles van die kwartaal is baie minder prettig; profes- sor Trelawney leer hulle nou om handpalms te lees, en sy sê sommer dadelik vir Harry dat hy die kortste lewenslyn het wat sy nog ooit gesien het.

Harry sien baie uit na die Verdediging teen die Donker Kunste-klas; na sy gesprek met Wood wil hy so gou moontlik met sy Anti-Dementorlesse begin.

“A, ja,” sê Lupin toe Harry hom aan die einde van die lesuur aan sy belofte herinner. “Laat ek sien . . . wat van Donderdagaand om agtuur? Die Geskiedenis van die Towerkuns se klaskamer behoort groot genoeg te wees . . . ek sal mooi moet dink hoe ons dit gaan doen . . . ons kan nie ’n egte Dementor na die kasteel bring om op te oefen nie . . .”

“Lyk maar nog siekerig, nè?” sê Ron toe hulle in die gang af loop om te gaan eet. “Wat dink jy makeer hom?”

Daar is ’n harde en ongeduldige “st!” agter hulle. Dit is Hermien wat aan die voete van ’n wapenrusting sit en haar tas, wat so vol is dat sy dit nie kan toekry nie, van voor af inpak.

“En vir wat sit en ‘st!’ jy vir ons?” sê Ron vies.

“Ek het nie,” sê Hermien hooghartig terwyl sy haar tas oor haar skouer swaai.

“Ja, jy het,” sê Ron. “Ek het gesê ek wonder wat Lupin makeer en toe het jy –”

“Wel, dis tog *duidelik*,” sê Hermien met ’n irriterende meerderwaardige trek op haar gesig.

“As jy nie vir ons wil sê nie, moet dan nie,” snou Ron haar toe.

“Goed,” sê Hermien uit die hoogte toe sy wegloop.

“Sy weet nie,” sê Ron terwyl hy haar wrewelig agterna kyk. “Sy probeer dit net regkry sodat ons weer met haar moet praat.”

Donderdagaand om agtuur verlaat Harry die Griffindortoring en stap na die Geskiedenis van die Towerkunsklas. Toe hy daar aankom, is dit donker en leeg daarbinne, maar hy steek die lampe met sy towerstaf aan en hoef net vyf minute te wag voor professor Lupin opdaag met ’n groot krat wat hy met inspanning op professor Binns se lessenaar neersit.

“Wat is dit?” vra Harry.

“Nog ’n Boggart,” sê professor Lupin terwyl hy sy mantel uittrek. “Ek het die kasteel sedert Dinsdag gefynkam en was gelukkig genoeg om hierdie een in mnr. Fillis se liasseerkabinet te kry. Dis die naaste wat ons aan ’n ware Dementor sal kom. Die Boggart sal in ’n Dementor verander sodra hy jou sien, dus sal ons op hom kan oefen. Ek sal hom in my kantoor stoor wanneer ons hom nie gebruik nie; daar’s ’n kas onder my lessenaar waarvan hy sal hou.”

“Goed,” sê Harry en probeer klink asof hy glad nie benoud is nie, bloot bly dat Lupin so ’n goeie plaasvervanger vir ’n regte Dementor gekry het.

“So . . .” Professor Lupin haal sy towerstaf uit en beduie dat Harry ook so moet maak. “Die towerspreuk wat ek jou gaan probeer leer, is baie gevorderd, Harry – ver bo die Uitsonderlike Intellektuele Liga. Dit word die Patronus-towerspreuk genoem.”

“Hoe werk dit?” vra Harry senuagtig.

“Wel, wanneer dit korrek werk, tower dit ’n Patronus op,” sê Lupin, “’n soort Anti-Dementor – ’n bewaker wat as skild tussen jou en die Dementor optree.”

Harry het skielik ’n visioen van hoe hy wegkruip agter ’n figuur wat so groot soos Hagrid is en wat ’n yslike knuppel vashou. Professor Lupin gaan voort, “Die Patronus is ’n soort positiewe mag, ’n projeksie van alles waarop die Dementors teer – hoop, geluk, die wil om te lewe – maar dit kan nie wanhoop voel soos gewone mense nie, dus kan die Dementor niks daaraan doen nie. Ek moet jou egter waarsku dat die Towerspreuk te gevorderd vir jou kan wees. Baie gekwalifiseerde towenaars sukkel daarmee.”

“Hoe lyk ’n Patronus?” vra Harry nuuskierig.

“Elkeen is uniek aan die toenaar wat hom optower.”

“En hoe tower ’n mens hom op?”

“Met ’n spesiale spreuk wat net werk as ’n mens met alle mag op ’n enkele, baie gelukkige herinnering konsentreer.”

Harry soek hard na 'n gelukkige herinnering. Niks wat met hom by die Dursleys gebeur het sal deug nie. Uiteindelik besluit hy op die oomblik toe hy vir die eerste keer op 'n besemstok gery het.

"Goed," sê hy en probeer die wonderlike, ligte gevoel in sy maag so presies moontlik oproep.

"Die towerspreuk is dit –" Lupin maak sy keel skoon, "*expecto patronum!*"

"*Expecto patronum,*" herhaal Harry binnensmonds, "*expecto patronum.*"

"Konsentreer jy hard op jou gelukkige herinnering?"

"O – ja –" sê Harry en dwing sy gedagtes vinnig terug na daardie eers-te besemrit. "*Expecto patrono* – nee, *patronum* – skuus, *expecto patronum, expecto patronum* –"

Iets warrel plotseling uit die punt van sy towerstaf; dit lyk soos 'n wolkie silwerige gas.

"Het u dit gesien?" sê Harry opgewonde. "Iets het gebeur!"

"Baie goed," sê Lupin glimlaggend. "Goed dan – gereed om dit op 'n Dementor te probeer?"

"Ja," sê Harry terwyl hy sy towerstaf stewig vasvat en na die middel van die verlate klaskamer beweeg. Hy probeer hard om op vlieg te konsentreer, maar iets bly tussenbeide kom . . . enige oomblik gaan hy sy ma dalk weer hoor . . . maar hy moet dit nie dink nie, anders gaan hy haar hoor, en hy wil nie . . . of wil hy?

Lupin vat die deksel van die krat vas en lig dit.

'n Dementor rys stadig uit die krat, sy bedekte gesig is na Harry gedraai, een glinsterende, geskubde hand hou sy mantel voor vas. Die lampe om die klaskamer flikker en gaan uit. Die Dementor klim uit die krat en gly stilweg op Harry af terwyl hy sy asem roggelend diep intrek. 'n Snerpend koue golf breek oor Harry –

"*Expecto patronum!*" gil Harry. "*Expecto patronum! Expecto –*"

Maar die klaskamer en die Dementor begin oplos . . . weer val Harry deur die digte wit mis en sy ma se stem is harder as ooit, dit eggo binne-in sy kop – "Nie Harry nie! Nie Harry nie! Asseblief – ek sal enigiets doen –"

"Gee pad – gee pad, vroumens –"

"Harry!"

Harry ruk wakker. Hy lê plat op sy rug op die vloer. Die klaskamer se lampe brand weer. Hy hoef nie te vra wat gebeur het nie.

"Jammer," stamel hy toe hy regop sit en die koue sweet agter sy brilglase voel afloop.

"Hoe voel jy?" vra Lupin.

"Oukei . . ." Harry trek homself regop aan een van die lessenaars en leun daarteen.

"Hier –" Lupin gee vir hom 'n Sjokoladepadda. "Eet dit voor ons weer."

probeer. Ek het nie verwag dat jy dit die eerste keer sal regkry nie. Om die waarheid te sê, ek sou totaal oorstelp gewees het as jy daarin geslaag het."

"Dit het erger geword," mompel Harry terwyl hy die Padda se kop afbyt. "Hierdie keer het ek haar harder gehoor – en vir hom – Woldemort –" Lupin lyk bleker as gewoonlik.

"Harry, as jy nie wil voortgaan nie, sal ek verstaan –"

"Ek wil!" sê Harry vurig terwyl hy die res van die Sjokoladepadda in sy mond stop. "Ek moet! Wat as die Dementors tydens ons wedstryd teen Raweklou opdaag? Ek kan dit nie bekostig om weer af te val nie. As ons hierdie wedstryd verloor, dan verloor ons die Kwiddiekbeker!"

"Goed dan . . ." sê Lupin. "Dalk moet jy 'n ander herinnering kies, 'n gelukkige herinnering, bedoel ek, om op te konsentreer . . . dit lyk of daardie een nie sterk genoeg is nie . . ."

Harry dink hard en besluit dat sy gevoelens toe Griffindor die vorige jaar die Huiskampioenskap gewen het, beslis as baie gelukkig kwalifiseer. Hy gryp sy towerstaf weer styf vas, en gaan staan in die middel van die klaskamer.

"Gereed?" sê Lupin en vat die deksel vas.

"Gereed," sê Harry en probeer hard om sy kop te vul met gelukkige gevoelens oor hoe Griffindor wen, en nie met donker gevoelens oor wat gaan gebeur wanneer die krat oopgemaak word nie.

"Begin!" sê Lupin en haal die deksel af. Weer word die kamer snerpend koud en donker. Die Dementor gly vorentoe, trek sy asem roggelend in; een verrotte hand is uitgesteek na Harry –

"*Expecto patronum!*" gil Harry. "*Expecto patronum! Expecto pat –*"

Wit mis benewel sy denke . . . groot, dowwe vorms beweeg om hom dan kom 'n nuwe stem, 'n man se stem wat paniekerig skree –

"Lily, vat vir Harry en hardloop! Dis Hy! Gaan! Hardloop! Ek sal hom afweer –"

Die geluid van iemand wat uit 'n vertrek strompel – 'n deur wat oopbars – 'n hoë kekkellag –

"Harry! Harry . . . word wakker . . ."

Lupin tik Harry hard deur die gesig. Hierdie keer neem dit 'n volle minuut voor Harry verstaan waarom hy op die klaskamer se stowwerige vloer lê.

"Ek het my pa gehoor," stamel Harry. "Dis die eerste keer ooit dat ek hom hoor – hy het probeer om self teen Woldemort te veg, om my ma kans te gee om weg te kom . . ."

Skielik besef Harry dat daar trane gemeng met sweet op sy gesig is. Hy laat sy kop so laag moontlik sak om dit aan sy kleed af te vee, terwyl hy voorgee dat hy 'n veter vasmaak sodat Lupin dit nie moet merk nie.

"Jy het vir James gehoor?" sê Lupin in 'n vreemde stem.

“Ja . . .” Sy gesig is nou droog en Harry kyk op. “Hoekom – het u dan my pa geken, of wat?”

“Ek – ek het, om die waarheid te sê,” sê Lupin. “Ons was vriende op Hogwarts. Luister, Harry – dalk moet ons dit hier laat vir vanaand. Hierdie towerspreuk is verskriklik gevorderd . . . ek hou nie daarvan om jou deur dit alles te laat gaan nie . . .”

“Nee!” sê Harry. Weer kom hy orent. “Ek sal nog een keer probeer! Ek dink nog net nie aan goed wat gelukkig genoeg is nie, dis wat . . . wag eers . . .”

Hy krap sy kop. ’n Werklik gelukkige herinnering . . . een wat ’n goeie, sterk Patronus sal word . . .

Die oomblik toe hy ontdek het dat hy ’n towenaar is en dat hy die Dursleys kan verlaat en na Hogwarts kan gaan! As dit nie ’n gelukkige herinnering is nie, dan weet hy nie . . . Terwyl hy baie hard konsentreer op hoe hy gevoel het toe hy besef het dat hy Ligusterlaan vir altyd gaan verlaat, kom Harry weer eens orent en wend hom na die krat.

“Gereed?” sê Lupin wat lyk asof hy dit teen sy beterwete doen. “Konsentreer jy hard? Goed – nou!”

Vir die derde keer lig hy die krat se deksel en die Dementor styg daaruit op; die vertrek word donker en koud –

“EXPECTO PATRONUM!” bulder Harry. “EXPECTO PATRONUM! EXPECTO PATRONUM!”

Die geskree in Harry se kop het weer begin – behalwe dat dit hierdie keer klink asof dit uit ’n radio kom wat sleg ingestel is. Sagter en harder en weer sagter . . . hy kan die Dementor nog steeds sien . . . dit het vasgesteek . . . en toe bars ’n groot, silwer skaduwee uit die punt van Harry se towerstaf en huiwer tussen hom en die Dementor en hoewel Harry se bene soos water voel, is hy nog steeds op sy voete . . . vir hoeveel langer weet hy nie . . .

“Riddikulus!” brul Lupin en spring vorentoe.

Daar is ’n harde klapgeluid en Harry se wolkerige Patronus verdwyn tesame met die Dementor en hy sink neer op ’n stoel. Hy voel so moeg asof hy so pas ’n kilometer gehardloop het, en sy bene bewe. Uit die hoek van sy oog sien hy hoe professor Lupin die Boggart met sy towerstaf terug in die krat dwing; dit het weer in ’n silwer skyf verander.

“Uitstekend!” sê Lupin toe hy oorstap na waar Harry sit. “Uitstekend, Harry! Dit was ’n baie goeie begin!”

“Kan ons weer probeer? Net nog een keer?”

“Nie nou nie,” sê Lupin ferm. “Jy het genoeg gehad vir een nag. Dê –” Hy gee vir Harry ’n groot blok van Honeydukes se lekkerste sjokolade. “Eet alles, of Madame Pomfrey sal agter my bloed aan wees. Dieselfde tyd volgende week?”

“Goed,” sê Harry. Hy neem ’n happie van die sjokolade en kyk hoe

Lupin die lampe uitblaas wat weer aangegaan het toe die Dementor verdwyn het. Hy het aan iets gedink.

“Professor Lupin?” sê hy. “As u my pa geken het, dan het u mos vir Sirius Swardt ook geken.”

Lupin draai baie vinnig om.

“Wat laat jou dit dink?” vra hy skerp.

“Niks – ek bedoel, ek weet hulle was ook vriende op Hogwarts . . .”

Lupin se gesig verslap.

“Ja, ek het hom geken,” sê hy kortaf. “Of liever, ek het so gedink. Jy moet gaan, Harry, dit word laat.”

Harry stap uit die klaskamer en af in die gang en om die hoek, en neem toe die kortpad agter ’n wapenrusting, waar hy op die voetlys gaan sit om sy sjokolade klaar te eet. Hy wens hy het liever nie oor Swardt gepraat nie; dit is duidelik dat Lupin nie genoeg neem met die onderwerp nie. Harry se gedagtes dwaal terug na sy ma en pa . . .

Hy is stokflou en voel vreemd leeg, al is hy vol sjokolade. Hoe vreeslik dit ook al mag wees om sy ouers se laaste oomblikke so in sy kop te hoor, is dit die enigste kere van toe hy ’n klein kindjie was dat Harry hul stemme hoor. Hy sal egter nooit ’n behoorlike Patronus kan skep as hy aanhou probeer om sy ouers te wil hoor nie . . .

“Hulle is dood,” sê hy streng vir homself. “Hulle is dood en om na hul eggo’s te luister, sal hulle nie terugbring nie. Jy moet jouself regruk as jy daardie Kwiddiekbeker wil wen.”

Hy staan op, prop die laaste stuk sjokolade in sy mond en sit af na die Griffindortoring.

’n Week na die kwartaal begin het, speel Raweklou teen Slibberin. Slibberin wen, hoewel naelskraap. Volgens Wood is dit goeie nuus vir Griffindor, wat in die tweede plek sal wees as hulle ook vir Raweklou klop. Hy vermeerder dus die aantal spanoefeninge na vyf per week. Dit beteken dat met Lupin se Anti-Dementorklasse wat op sigself meer uitputtend as ses Kwiddiekoefeninge is, Harry net een aand per week het om al sy huiswerk te doen. Tog is hy nie naastenby onder soveel druk as Hermien nie, wie se ontsettende werkslading haar skynbaar nou begin onderkry. Hermien kan elke aand, sonder uitsondering, in die hoek van die geselskamer gesien word met verskeie tafels vol boeke, Rekenmatiekkarte, Runeskrif-woordeboeke, diagramme van Moggels wat swaar voorwerpe optel, en lêer op lêer met notas; sy praat met omtrent niemand nie, en jak diegene al wat haar onderbreek.

“Hoe doen sy dit?” brom Ron een aand teenoor Harry terwyl Harry ’n nare opstel oor Onopspoorbare Gifstowwe vir Snerp sit en klaarmaak. Harry kyk op. Hermien is skaars sigbaar agter ’n wankellende berg boeke.

“Doen wat?”

“Kom by al haar klasse!” sê Ron. “Ek het haar vanoggend met professor Vektor, daardie Rekenmatiekheks, hoor praat. Hulle het aangegaan oor gister se les, maar Hermien kon nie daar gewees het nie, want sy was saam met ons by Versorging van Magiese Kreature! En Ernie McMillan sê vir my sy’t nog nooit ’n Moggelstudieklas gemis nie, maar die helfte van hulle val in dieselfde tyd as Waarsêery, en sy’t daarvan ook nog nooit een gemis nie!”

Harry het nie tyd om oor die geheim van Hermien se onmoontlike lesrooster te tob nie; hy moet aan Snerp se opstel werk. Twee sekondes later word hy egter weer onderbreek, hierdie keer deur Wood.

“Slegte nuus, Harry. Ek was nou net by professor McGonagall oor daardie Vuurslag. Sy – h’m – sy’t bietjie op haar perdjie geklim. Vir my gesê ek moet my prioriteite reg kry. Lyk my sy dink ek gee meer om vir die Beker as vir jou veiligheid. Net omdat ek gesê het dit traak my min as dit jou afgooi, solank jy net eers die Snip vang.” Wood skud sy kop ongelowig. “Sowaar, die manier waarop sy my uitgeskel het . . . jy sou dink ek het iets vreesliks gesê. Toe ek vir haar vra hoeveel langer sy dit nog gaan hou . . .” Hy trek skewebek en maak professor McGonagall se streng stem na, “So lank as wat nodig is, Wood! . . . Ek sou sê dis tyd dat jy ’n nuwe besem bestel, Harry. Daar’s ’n bestelvorm agterin *Watter Besemstok* . . . jy kan ’n Nimbus Tweeduisend-en-een kry, soos Malfoy’s’n.”

“Ek koop nie iets wat Malfoy dink goed is nie,” sê Harry onomwonde.

Januarie vervaag geleidelik in Februarie met geen verandering in die bitter koue weer nie. Die wedstryd teen Raweklou kom nader en nader, maar Harry het nog steeds nie ’n nuwe besem bestel nie. Hy vra nou na elke Transfigurasië-les vir professor McGonagall wat aangaan, terwyl Ron hoopvol langs hom staan en Hermien met ’n weggedraaide gesig verbystorm.

“Nee, Potter, jy kan dit nog nie terugkry nie,” sê professor McGonagall vir hom die twaalfde keer dat dit gebeur, en nog voor hy selfs sy mond oopgemaak het. “Ons het reeds vir die meeste van die gewone vloeke getoets, maar professor Flickerpiet reken daar rus dalk ’n Afsmytvloek op die besem. Ek sal jou sê sodra ons klaar is met die toetse. Hou asseblief op om my te verpes.”

Om sake te vererger, verloop Harry se Anti-Dementorlesse nie naastenby so goed soos hy gehoop het nie. Verskeie lesse later kan hy darem ’n dowwe, silwerige skaduwee skep elke keer dat die Boggart-Dementor na hom toe kom, maar sy Patronus is te swak om die Dementor weg te dryf. Dit hang net daar soos ’n halfdeurskynende wolk en tap Harry se energie, want hy moet veg om dit daar te hou. Harry is vies vir homself en voel skuldig oor sy geheime begeerte om sy ouers se stemme te wil hoor.

“Jy stel te hoë eise aan jouself,” sê professor Lupin streng tydens die

vierde week dat hulle oefen. "Vir 'n dertienjarige towenaar is selfs 'n vae Patronus 'n reuseprestasie. Jy val nie meer flou nie, of hoe?"

"Ek het gedink dat 'n Patronus die – die Dementors sal aanval of iets," sê Harry ontnugter, "hulle laat verdwyn –"

"Dit is inderdaad wat 'n ware Patronus doen," sê Lupin, "maar jy het verbasend baie in 'n baie kort tydjie reggekry. As die Dementors by die volgende Kwiddiek-wedstryd sou opdaag, sal jy hulle lank genoeg kan afweer om terug op die grond te kan kom."

"U het gesê dis moeiliker as daar baie van hulle is," sê Harry.

"Ek het volle vertroue in jou," sê Lupin glimlaggend. "Hier – jy verdien iets. Dit kom van die Drie Besemstokke af, jy sal dit nie ken nie –"

Hy haal twee bottels uit sy boeketas.

"Botterbier!" sê Harry sonder om te dink. "Ja, ek hou daarvan!"

Lupin lig 'n wenkbrou.

"H'm – Ron en Hermien het vir my daarvan van Hogsmeade af gebring," jok Harry gou.

"Ek sien," sê Lupin, hoewel hy nog steeds effens agterdogtig lyk. "Wel – kom ons drink op Griffindor se oorwinning oor Raweklou! Nie dat ek as onderwyser veronderstel is om kant te kies nie . . ." voeg hy haastig by.

Hulle drink die Botterbier in stilte, tot Harry iets vra waaroor hy 'n geruime tyd reeds wonder.

"Wat is onder 'n Dementor se kap?"

Professor Lupin laat sak sy bottel peinsend.

"H'mmm . . . wel, die enigste mense wat regtig weet, is nie daartoe in staat om ons te vertel nie. Jy sien, die Dementor laat sy kap net sak wanneer hy sy laaste en vreeslikste wapen gaan gebruik."

"Wat's dit?"

"Hulle noem dit die Dementorskus," sê Lupin met 'n effens verwronge glimlag. "Dit is wat Dementors doen as hulle iemand heeltemal wil vernietig. Ek sou sê daar moet die een of ander soort mond daar binne wees, want hulle klem hul kake oor die slagoffer se mond en – en suig sy siel uit."

Harry spoeg per ongeluk 'n bietjie Botterbier uit.

"Wat – hulle maak hulle dood –?"

"O, nee," sê Lupin. "Dis baie erger as dit. Jy kan nog bestaan sonder jou siel, weet jy, solank jou brein en jou hart nog werk. Jy is egter glad nie meer bewus van jouself nie, het geen geheue, geen . . . niks. Daar is nie 'n kans op herstel nie. Jy bestaan bloot. 'n Leë dop. En jou siel is vir altyd . . . verlore."

Lupin drink nog 'n bietjie Botterbier en sê dan, "Dit is die lot wat op Sirius Swardt wag. Dit was vanoggend in die *Daaglikse Profeet*. Die Ministerie vir Towerkuns het die Dementors verlof gegee om dit toe te pas as hulle hom kry."

Vir 'n oomblik is Harry verlam by die gedagte aan hoe iemand se siel deur sy mond uitgesuig word. Toe dink hy aan Swardt.

"Hy verdien dit," sê hy meteens.

"Dink jy so?" sê Lupin ligweg. "Dink jy regtig dat enigiemand dit verdien?"

"Ja," sê Harry uitdagend. "Vir . . . vir party goed . . ."

Hy sou graag vir Lupin wou vertel van die gesprek in die Drie Besemstokke oor hoe Swardt sy ma en pa verraai het, maar dit sal beteken dat hy moet sê dat hy sonder verlof na Hogsmeade gegaan het, en hy weet dat Lupin nie baie beïndruk daarmee sal wees nie. Dus drink hy sy Botterbier op, bedank Lupin, en verlaat die Geskiedenis van Towerkuns se klaskamer.

Harry wens so half dat hy nie gevra het wat onder 'n Dementor se kap is nie, die antwoord was net te aaklig, en hy is so versenke in onplesierige gedagtes oor hoe dit moet voel as jou siel uit jou gesuig word, dat hy halfpad boontoe kop eerste in professor McGonagall vasloop.

"Kyk waar jy loop, Potter!"

"Jammer, professor –"

"Ek het jou nou net daar in die Griffindor-geselskamer gaan soek. Wel, hier is dit, ons het alles gedoen waaraan ons kon dink, en dit lyk of daar na alles nie fout is nie – iewers het jy 'n baie goeie vriend, Potter."

Harry se mond val oop. Sy hou die Vuurslag na hom uit, en dit lyk net so manjifiek soos tevore.

"Ek kan dit terugkry?" sê Harry floutjies. "Regtig?"

"Regtig," sê professor McGonagall, en sy glimlag sowaar. "Ek sou sê jy moet die gevoel daarvoor kry voor Saterdag se wedstryd, of hoe? En Potter – probeer wen, sal jy? Anders kom ons vir die agste agtereenvolgende jaar nie in aanmerking nie, soos professor Snerp so vriendelik was om gisteraand vir my te sê . . ."

Harry is sprakeloos toe hy die Vuurslag met die trappe op na die Griffindortoring dra. Toe hy om die hoek gaan, sien hy hoe Ron, wat van oor tot oor glimlag, aangehardloop kom.

"Sy't dit vir jou gegee? Uitstekend! Luister, kan ek dit nog uitprobeer? Mōre?"

"Ja . . . net wanneer jy wil . . ." sê Harry wie se hart ligter is as wat dit die afgelope maand ooit was. "Weet jy wat – ons moet met Hermien vrede maak. Sy het net probeer help . . ."

"Ja, oukei," sê Ron. "Sy's op die oomblik in die geselskamer – vir 'n verandering."

Hulle draai af in die gang na die Griffindortoring en sien hoe Neville Loggerenberg by sir Cadogan pleit, wat lyk of hy weier om hom te laat ingaan.

"Ek het dit neergeskryf," sê Neville tranerig; "maar ek moet dit iewers laat val het!"

“Watter bog!” brul sir Cadogan. Toe sien hy vir Harry en Ron. “Goeie-naand, my knap jong soldate! Slaan hierdie dwaas in ysters, hy probeer homself met mag en geweld in hierdie kamers indwing!”

“Ag, hou jou mond,” sê Ron toe hy en Harry by Neville kom.

“Ek het die wagwoorde verloor!” sê Neville mistroostig vir hulle. “Ek het hom gedwing om my te vertel watter wagwoorde hy hierdie week gaan gebruik, want hy hou aan om hulle te verander, en nou weet ek nie wat ek daarmee gemaak het nie!”

“Potkoddigsierlik,” sê Harry vir sir Cadogan, wat uiters teleurgesteld lyk en traag vorentoe swaai om hulle by die geselskamer in te laat. Daar is ’n skielike, opgewonde gebrom soos elke kop draai, en die volgende oomblik is Harry omring deur mense wat ’n ophef oor sy Vuurslag maak.

“Waar kry jy dit, Harry?”

“Kan ek dit uitprobeer?”

“Het jy al daarop gery, Harry?”

“Raweklou het nie ’n kans nie, hulle is almal op Wegvee Sewes!”

“Kan ek dit net *vashou*, Harry?”

Na so tien minute waarin die Vuurslag rondgee en uit elke hoek bewonder is, gaan die skare uiteen en kan Harry en Ron vir Hermien duidelik sien. Sy sit gebukkend oor haar werk en doen moeite om hul oë te vermy, die enigste persoon wat nie op hulle afgestorm het nie. Harry en Ron stap na haar tafel en sy kyk uiteindelik op.

“Ek het dit teruggekry,” sê Harry grinnikend vir haar terwyl hy die Vuurslag omhoop hou.

“Sien, Hermien? Daar was toe niks daarmee verkeerd nie!” sê Ron.

“Wel – iets *kon* verkeerd gewees het!” sê Hermien. “Ek bedoel, ten minste weet jy nou dat dit veilig is!”

“Ja, dit is seker so,” sê Harry. “Ek gaan dit gou bo bêre –”

“Ek sal,” sê Ron gretig. “Ek moet vir Skille sy Rot-tonikum gaan gee.”

Hy neem die Vuurslag, asof dit van glas gemaak is, en dra dit op met die seuns se trappe.

“Kan ek maar hier sit?” vra Harry vir Hermien.

“Ek skat so,” sê Hermien en verwyder ’n groot stapel perkament van ’n stoel.

Harry kyk na die deurmekaar tafel, na die lang Rekenmatiekopstel waarop die ink nog glinster, na die selfs langer opstel vir Moggelstudies (“Verduidelik waarom Moggels Elektrisiteit benodig”) en na die Rune-vertaling waarmee Hermien op die oomblik besig is.

“Hoe kry jy dit alles gedoen?” vra Harry vir haar.

“O, wel – jy weet – werk hard,” sê Hermien. Van naby kan Harry sien dat sy amper so moeg soos Lupin lyk.

“Hoekom los jy nie net ’n paar vakke nie?” vra Harry terwyl hy kyk hoe sy haar boeke oplig op soek na haar Rune-woordeboek.

“Ek kan dit mos nie doen nie!” sê Hermien geskok.

“Rekenmatiek lyk aaklig,” sê Harry toe hy ’n nommerkaart optel wat besonder ingewikkeld lyk.

“O, nee, dis wonderlik!” sê Hermien ernstig. “Dis my gunstelingvak! Dis —”

Presies wat so wonderlik aan Rekenmatiek is, sal Harry nooit weet nie. Op daardie presiese oomblik weerklink ’n gewurgde kreet vanaf die seuns se trappe. Die hele geselskamer word stil en staan versteen na die ingang. Dan volg gejaagde voetstappe wat harder en harder word — en toe verskyn Ron met ’n laken wat hy agter hom aansleep.

“KYK!” bulder hy en pyl op Hermien se tafel af. “KYK!” gil hy en swaai die laken voor haar gesig.

“Ron, wat —?”

“SKILLE! KYK! SKILLE!”

Hermien leun van Ron af weg. Sy lyk totaal verwilderd. Harry kyk na die laken wat Ron vashou. Daar is iets roois op. Iets wat aaklig baie lyk soos —

“BLOED!” gil Ron in die verstomde stilte. “HY’S WEG! EN WEET JY WAT WAS OP DIE VLOER?”

“N-nee,” sê Hermien in ’n bewende stem.

Ron gooi iets op Hermien se Rune-vertaling neer. Hermien en Harry leun nader. Bo-op die vreemde rune-skrif lê etlike lang gemmerkleurige kathare.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN



GRYFFINDOR VERSUS RAVENCLAW

It looked like the end of Ron and Hermione's friendship. Each was so angry with the other that Harry couldn't see how they'd ever make up.

Ron was enraged that Hermione had never taken Crookshanks's attempts to eat Scabbers seriously, hadn't bothered to keep a close enough watch on him, and was still trying to pretend that Crookshanks was innocent by suggesting that Ron look for Scabbers under all the boys' beds. Hermione, meanwhile, maintained fiercely that Ron had no proof that Crookshanks had eaten Scabbers, that the ginger hairs might have been there since Christmas, and that Ron had been prejudiced against her cat ever since Crookshanks had landed on Ron's head in the Magical Menagerie.

Personally, Harry was sure that Crookshanks had eaten Scabbers, and when he tried to point out to Hermione that the evidence all pointed that way, she lost her temper with Harry too.

“Okay, side with Ron, I knew you would!” she said shrilly. “First the Firebolt, now Scabbers, everything’s my fault, isn’t it! Just leave me alone, Harry, I’ve got a lot of work to do!”

Ron had taken the loss of his rat very hard indeed.

“Come on, Ron, you were always saying how boring Scabbers was,” said Fred bracingly. “And he’s been off-color for ages, he was wasting away. It was probably better for him to snuff it quickly — one swallow — he probably didn’t feel a thing.”

“*Fred!*” said Ginny indignantly.

“All he did was eat and sleep, Ron, you said it yourself,” said George.

“He bit Goyle for us once!” Ron said miserably. “Remember, Harry?”

“Yeah, that’s true,” said Harry.

“His finest hour,” said Fred, unable to keep a straight face. “Let the scar on Goyle’s finger stand as a lasting tribute to his memory. Oh, come on, Ron, get yourself down to Hogsmeade and buy a new rat, what’s the point of moaning?”

In a last-ditch attempt to cheer Ron up, Harry persuaded him to come along to the Gryffindor team’s final practice before the Ravenclaw match, so that he could have a ride on the Firebolt after they’d finished. This did seem to take Ron’s mind off Scabbers for a moment (“Great! Can I try and shoot a few goals on it?”) so they set off for the Quidditch field together.

Madam Hooch, who was still overseeing Gryffindor practices to keep an eye on Harry, was just as impressed with the Firebolt as everyone else had been. She took it in her hands before takeoff and gave them the benefit of her professional opinion.

“Look at the balance on it! If the Nimbus series has a fault, it’s a slight list to the tail end — you often find they develop a drag after a few years. They’ve updated the handle too, a bit slimmer than the Cleansweeps, reminds me of the old Silver Arrows — a pity they’ve stopped making them. I learned to fly on one, and a very fine old broom it was too. . . .”

She continued in this vein for some time, until Wood said, “Er — Madam Hooch? Is it okay if Harry has the Firebolt back? We need to practice. . . .”

“Oh — right — here you are, then, Potter,” said Madam Hooch. “I’ll sit over here with Weasley. . . .”

She and Ron left the field to sit in the stadium, and the Gryffindor team gathered around Wood for his final instructions for tomorrow’s match.

“Harry, I’ve just found out who Ravenclaw is playing as Seeker. It’s Cho Chang. She’s a fourth year, and she’s pretty good. . . . I really hoped she wouldn’t be fit, she’s had some problems with injuries. . . .” Wood scowled his displeasure that Cho Chang had made a full recovery, then said, “On the other hand, she rides a Comet Two Sixty, which is going to look like a joke next to the Firebolt.” He gave Harry’s broom a look of fervent admiration, then said, “Okay, everyone, let’s go —”

And at long last, Harry mounted his Firebolt, and kicked off from

the ground.

It was better than he'd ever dreamed. The Firebolt turned with the lightest touch; it seemed to obey his thoughts rather than his grip; it sped across the field at such speed that the stadium turned into a green-and-gray blur; Harry turned it so sharply that Alicia Spinnet screamed, then he went into a perfectly controlled dive, brushing the grassy field with his toes before rising thirty, forty, fifty feet into the air again —

“Harry, I'm letting the Snitch out!” Wood called.

Harry turned and raced a Bludger toward the goalposts; he outstripped it easily, saw the Snitch dart out from behind Wood, and within ten seconds had caught it tightly in his hand.

The team cheered madly. Harry let the Snitch go again, gave it a minute's head start, then tore after it, weaving in and out of the others; he spotted it lurking near Katie Bell's knee, looped her easily, and caught it again.

It was the best practice ever; the team, inspired by the presence of the Firebolt in their midst, performed their best moves faultlessly, and by the time they hit the ground again, Wood didn't have a single criticism to make, which, as George Weasley pointed out, was a first.

“I can't see what's going to stop us tomorrow!” said Wood. “Not unless — Harry, you've sorted out your dementor problem, haven't you?”

“Yeah,” said Harry, thinking of his feeble Patronus and wishing it were stronger.

“The dementors won't turn up again, Oliver. Dumbledore'd go ballistic,” said Fred confidently.

“Well, let’s hope not,” said Wood. “Anyway — good work, everyone. Let’s get back to the tower . . . turn in early —”

“I’m staying out for a bit; Ron wants a go on the Firebolt,” Harry told Wood, and while the rest of the team headed off to the locker rooms, Harry strode over to Ron, who vaulted the barrier to the stands and came to meet him. Madam Hooch had fallen asleep in her seat.

“Here you go,” said Harry, handing Ron the Firebolt.

Ron, an expression of ecstasy on his face, mounted the broom and zoomed off into the gathering darkness while Harry walked around the edge of the field, watching him. Night had fallen before Madam Hooch awoke with a start, told Harry and Ron off for not waking her, and insisted that they go back to the castle.

Harry shouldered the Firebolt and he and Ron walked out of the shadowy stadium, discussing the Firebolt’s superbly smooth action, its phenomenal acceleration, and its pinpoint turning. They were halfway toward the castle when Harry, glancing to his left, saw something that made his heart turn over — a pair of eyes, gleaming out of the darkness.

Harry stopped dead, his heart banging against his ribs.

“What’s the matter?” said Ron.

Harry pointed. Ron pulled out his wand and muttered, “*Lumos!*”

A beam of light fell across the grass, hit the bottom of a tree, and illuminated its branches; there, crouching among the budding leaves, was Crookshanks.

“Get out of here!” Ron roared, and he stooped down and seized a stone lying on the grass, but before he could do anything else,

Crookshanks had vanished with one swish of his long ginger tail.

“See?” Ron said furiously, chucking the stone down again. “She’s still letting him wander about wherever he wants — probably washing down Scabbers with a couple of birds now. . . .”

Harry didn’t say anything. He took a deep breath as relief seeped through him; he had been sure for a moment that those eyes had belonged to the Grim. They set off for the castle once more. Slightly ashamed of his moment of panic, Harry didn’t say anything to Ron — nor did he look left or right until they had reached the well-lit entrance hall.

Harry went down to breakfast the next morning with the rest of the boys in his dormitory, all of whom seemed to think the Firebolt deserved a sort of guard of honor. As Harry entered the Great Hall, heads turned in the direction of the Firebolt, and there was a good deal of excited muttering. Harry saw, with enormous satisfaction, that the Slytherin team were all looking thunderstruck.

“Did you see his face?” said Ron gleefully, looking back at Malfoy. “He can’t believe it! This is brilliant!”

Wood, too, was basking in the reflected glory of the Firebolt.

“Put it here, Harry,” he said, laying the broom in the middle of the table and carefully turning it so that its name faced upward. People from the Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff tables were soon coming over to look. Cedric Diggory came over to congratulate Harry on having acquired such a superb replacement for his Nimbus, and Percy’s Ravenclaw girlfriend, Penelope Clearwater, asked if she could actually hold the Firebolt.

“Now, now, Penny, no sabotage!” said Percy heartily as she examined the Firebolt closely. “Penelope and I have got a bet on,” he told the team. “Ten Galleons on the outcome of the match!”

Penelope put the Firebolt down again, thanked Harry, and went back to her table.

“Harry — make sure you win,” said Percy, in an urgent whisper. “*I haven’t got ten Galleons*. Yes, I’m coming, Penny!” And he bustled off to join her in a piece of toast.

“Sure you can manage that broom, Potter?” said a cold, drawling voice.

Draco Malfoy had arrived for a closer look, Crabbe and Goyle right behind him.

“Yeah, reckon so,” said Harry casually.

“Got plenty of special features, hasn’t it?” said Malfoy, eyes glittering maliciously. “Shame it doesn’t come with a parachute — in case you get too near a dementor.”

Crabbe and Goyle sniggered.

“Pity you can’t attach an extra arm to yours, Malfoy,” said Harry. “Then it could catch the Snitch for you.”

The Gryffindor team laughed loudly. Malfoy’s pale eyes narrowed, and he stalked away. They watched him rejoin the rest of the Slytherin team, who put their heads together, no doubt asking Malfoy whether Harry’s broom really was a Firebolt.

At a quarter to eleven, the Gryffindor team set off for the locker rooms. The weather couldn’t have been more different from their match against Hufflepuff. It was a clear, cool day with a very light breeze; there would be no visibility problems this time, and Harry,

though nervous, was starting to feel the excitement only a Quidditch match could bring. They could hear the rest of the school moving into the stadium beyond. Harry took off his black school robes, removed his wand from his pocket, and stuck it inside the T-shirt he was going to wear under his Quidditch robes. He only hoped he wouldn't need it. He wondered suddenly whether Professor Lupin was in the crowd, watching.

"You know what we've got to do," said Wood as they prepared to leave the locker rooms. "If we lose this match, we're out of the running. Just — just fly like you did in practice yesterday, and we'll be okay!"

They walked out onto the field to tumultuous applause. The Ravenclaw team, dressed in blue, were already standing in the middle of the field. Their Seeker, Cho Chang, was the only girl on their team. She was shorter than Harry by about a head, and Harry couldn't help noticing, nervous as he was, that she was extremely pretty. She smiled at Harry as the teams faced each other behind their captains, and he felt a slight lurch in the region of his stomach that he didn't think had anything to do with nerves.

"Wood, Davies, shake hands," Madam Hooch said briskly, and Wood shook hands with the Ravenclaw Captain.

"Mount your brooms . . . on my whistle . . . three — two — one —"

Harry kicked off into the air and the Firebolt zoomed higher and faster than any other broom; he soared around the stadium and began squinting around for the Snitch, listening all the while to the commentary, which was being provided by the Weasley twins' friend

Lee Jordan.

“They’re off, and the big excitement this match is the Firebolt that Harry Potter is flying for Gryffindor. According to *Which Broomstick*, the Firebolt’s going to be the broom of choice for the national teams at this year’s World Championship —”

“Jordan, would you mind telling us what’s going on in the match?” interrupted Professor McGonagall’s voice.

“Right you are, Professor — just giving a bit of background information — the Firebolt, incidentally, has a built-in auto-brake and —”

“Jordan!”

“Okay, okay, Gryffindor in possession, Katie Bell of Gryffindor heading for goal . . .”

Harry streaked past Katie in the opposite direction, gazing around for a glint of gold and noticing that Cho Chang was tailing him closely. She was undoubtedly a very good flier — she kept cutting across him, forcing him to change direction.

“Show her your acceleration, Harry!” Fred yelled as he whooshed past in pursuit of a Bludger that was aiming for Alicia.

Harry urged the Firebolt forward as they rounded the Ravenclaw goalposts and Cho fell behind. Just as Katie succeeded in scoring the first goal of the match, and the Gryffindor end of the field went wild, he saw it — the Snitch was close to the ground, flitting near one of the barriers.

Harry dived; Cho saw what he was doing and tore after him — Harry was speeding up, excitement flooding him; dives were his speciality, he was ten feet away —

Then a Bludger, hit by one of the Ravenclaw Beaters, came pelting out of nowhere; Harry veered off course, avoiding it by an inch, and in those few, crucial seconds, the Snitch had vanished.

There was a great “Ooooooh” of disappointment from the Gryffindor supporters, but much applause for their Beater from the Ravenclaw end. George Weasley vented his feelings by hitting the second Bludger directly at the offending Beater, who was forced to roll right over in midair to avoid it.

“Gryffindor leads by eighty points to zero, and look at that Firebolt go! Potter’s really putting it through its paces now, see it turn — Chang’s Comet is just no match for it, the Firebolt’s precision-balance is really noticeable in these long —”

“JORDAN! ARE YOU BEING PAID TO ADVERTISE FIREBOLTS? GET ON WITH THE COMMENTARY!”

Ravenclaw was pulling back; they had now scored three goals, which put Gryffindor only fifty points ahead — if Cho got the Snitch before him, Ravenclaw would win. Harry dropped lower, narrowly avoiding a Ravenclaw Chaser, scanning the field frantically — a glint of gold, a flutter of tiny wings — the Snitch was circling the Gryffindor goalpost —

Harry accelerated, eyes fixed on the speck of gold ahead — but just then, Cho appeared out of thin air, blocking him —

“HARRY, THIS IS NO TIME TO BE A GENTLEMAN!” Wood roared as Harry swerved to avoid a collision. “KNOCK HER OFF HER BROOM IF YOU HAVE TO!”

Harry turned and caught sight of Cho; she was grinning. The Snitch had vanished again. Harry turned his Firebolt upward and was soon

twenty feet above the game. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Cho following him. . . . She'd decided to mark him rather than search for the Snitch herself. . . . All right, then. . . if she wanted to tail him, she'd have to take the consequences. . . .

He dived again, and Cho, thinking he'd seen the Snitch, tried to follow; Harry pulled out of the dive very sharply; she hurtled downward; he rose fast as a bullet once more, and then saw it, for the third time — the Snitch was glittering way above the field at the Ravenclaw end.

He accelerated; so, many feet below, did Cho. He was winning, gaining on the Snitch with every second: — then —

“Oh!” screamed Cho, pointing.

Distracted, Harry looked down.

Three dementors, three tall, black, hooded dementors, were looking up at him.

He didn't stop to think. Plunging a hand down the neck of his robes, he whipped out his wand and roared, “*Expecto Patronum!*”

Something silver-white, something enormous, erupted from the end of his wand. He knew it had shot directly at the dementors but didn't pause to watch; his mind still miraculously clear, he looked ahead — he was nearly there. He stretched out the hand still grasping his wand and just managed to close his fingers over the small, struggling Snitch.

Madam Hooch's whistle sounded. Harry turned around in midair and saw six scarlet blurs bearing down on him; next moment, the whole team was hugging him so hard he was nearly pulled off his broom. Down below he could hear the roars of the Gryffindors in the

crowd.

“That’s my boy!” Wood kept yelling. Alicia, Angelina, and Katie had all kissed Harry; Fred had him in a grip so tight Harry felt as though his head would come off. In complete disarray, the team managed to make its way back to the ground. Harry got off his broom and looked up to see a gaggle of Gryffindor supporters sprinting onto the field, Ron in the lead. Before he knew it, he had been engulfed by the cheering crowd.

“Yes!” Ron yelled, yanking Harry’s arm into the air. “Yes! Yes!”

“Well *done*, Harry!” said Percy, looking delighted. “Ten Galleons to me! Must find Penelope, excuse me —”

“Good for you, Harry!” roared Seamus Finnigan.

“Ruddy brilliant!” boomed Hagrid over the heads of the milling Gryffindors.

“That was quite some Patronus,” said a voice in Harry’s ear.

Harry turned around to see Professor Lupin, who looked both shaken and pleased.

“The dementors didn’t affect me at all!” Harry said excitedly. “I didn’t feel a thing!”

“That would be because they — er — weren’t dementors,” said Professor Lupin. “Come and see —”

He led Harry out of the crowd until they were able to see the edge of the field.

“You gave Mr. Malfoy quite a fright,” said Lupin.

Harry stared. Lying in a crumpled heap on the ground were Malfoy, Crabbe, Goyle, and Marcus Flint, the Slytherin team Captain, all struggling to remove themselves from long, black, hooded robes.

It looked as though Malfoy had been standing on Goyle's shoulders. Standing over them, with an expression of the utmost fury on her face, was Professor McGonagall.

"An unworthy trick!" she was shouting. "A low and cowardly attempt to sabotage the Gryffindor Seeker! Detention for all of you, and fifty points from Slytherin! I shall be speaking to Professor Dumbledore about this, make no mistake! Ah, here he comes now!"

If anything could have set the seal on Gryffindor's victory, it was this. Ron, who had fought his way through to Harry's side, doubled up with laughter as they watched Malfoy fighting to extricate himself from the robe, Goyle's head still stuck inside it.

"Come on, Harry!" said George, fighting his way over. "Party! Gryffindor common room, now!"

"Right," said Harry, and feeling happier than he had in ages, he and the rest of the team led the way, still in their scarlet robes, out of the stadium and back up to the castle.

It felt as though they had already won the Quidditch Cup; the party went on all day and well into the night. Fred and George Weasley disappeared for a couple of hours and returned with armfuls of bottles of butterbeer, pumpkin fizz, and several bags full of Honeydukes sweets.

"How did you do that?" squealed Angelina Johnson as George started throwing Peppermint Toads into the crowd.

"With a little help from Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, and Prongs," Fred muttered in Harry's ear.

Only one person wasn't joining in the festivities. Hermione,

incredibly, was sitting in a corner, attempting to read an enormous book entitled *Home Life and Social Habits of British Muggles*. Harry broke away from the table where Fred and George had started juggling butterbeer bottles and went over to her.

“Did you even come to the match?” he asked her.

“Of course I did,” said Hermione in a strangely high-pitched voice, not looking up. “And I’m very glad we won, and I think you did really well, but I need to read this by Monday.”

“Come on, Hermione, come and have some food,” Harry said, looking over at Ron and wondering whether he was in a good enough mood to bury the hatchet.

“I can’t, Harry. I’ve still got four hundred and twenty-two pages to read!” said Hermione, now sounding slightly hysterical. “Anyway . . .” She glanced over at Ron too. “*He* doesn’t want me to join in.”

There was no arguing with this, as Ron chose that moment to say loudly, “If Scabbers hadn’t just been *eaten*, he could have had some of those Fudge Flies. He used to really like them —”

Hermione burst into tears. Before Harry could say or do anything, she tucked the enormous book under her arm, and, still sobbing, ran toward the staircase to the girls’ dormitories and out of sight.

“Can’t you give her a break?” Harry asked Ron quietly.

“No,” said Ron flatly. “If she just acted like she was sorry — but she’ll never admit she’s wrong, Hermione. She’s still acting like Scabbers has gone on vacation or something.”

The Gryffindor party ended only when Professor McGonagall turned up in her tartan dressing gown and hair net at one in the

morning, to insist that they all go to bed. Harry and Ron climbed the stairs to their dormitory, still discussing the match. At last, exhausted, Harry climbed into bed, twitched the hangings of his four-poster shut to block out a ray of moonlight, lay back, and felt himself almost instantly drifting off to sleep.

He had a very strange dream. He was walking through a forest, his Firebolt over his shoulder, following something silvery-white. It was winding its way through the trees ahead, and he could only catch glimpses of it between the leaves. Anxious to catch up with it, he sped up, but as he moved faster, so did his quarry. Harry broke into a run, and ahead he heard hooves gathering speed. Now he was running flat out, and ahead he could hear galloping. Then he turned a corner into a clearing and —

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARRRRRRRRRRRRRRGGGGGGHHHHH!
NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!”

Harry woke as suddenly as though he'd been hit in the face. Disoriented in the total darkness, he fumbled with his hangings — he could hear movements around him, and Seamus Finnigan's voice from the other side of the room: “What's going on?”

Harry thought he heard the dormitory door slam. At last finding the divide in his curtains, he ripped them back, and at the same moment, Dean Thomas lit his lamp.

Ron was sitting up in bed, the hangings torn from one side, a look of utmost terror on his face.

“Black! Sirius Black! With a knife!”

“*What?*”

“Here! Just now! Slashed the curtains! Woke me up!”

“You sure you weren’t dreaming, Ron?” said Dean.

“Look at the curtains! I tell you, he was here!”

They all scrambled out of bed; Harry reached the dormitory door first, and they sprinted back down the staircase. Doors opened behind them, and sleepy voices called after them.

“Who shouted?”

“What’re you doing?”

The common room was lit with the glow of the dying fire, still littered with the debris from the party. It was deserted.

“Are you *sure* you weren’t dreaming, Ron?”

“I’m telling you, I saw him!”

“What’s all the noise?”

“Professor McGonagall told us to go to bed!”

A few of the girls had come down their staircase, pulling on dressing gowns and yawning. Boys, too, were reappearing.

“Excellent, are we carrying on?” said Fred Weasley brightly.

“Everyone back upstairs!” said Percy, hurrying into the common room and pinning his Head Boy badge to his pajamas as he spoke.

“Perce — Sirius Black!” said Ron faintly. “In our dormitory! With a knife! Woke me up!”

The common room went very still.

“Nonsense!” said Percy, looking startled. “You had too much to eat, Ron — had a nightmare —”

“I’m telling you —”

“Now, really, enough’s enough!”

Professor McGonagall was back. She slammed the portrait behind

her as she entered the common room and stared furiously around.

"I am delighted that Gryffindor won the match, but this is getting ridiculous! Percy, I expected better of you!"

"I certainly didn't authorize this, Professor!" said Percy, puffing himself up indignantly. "I was just telling them all to get back to bed! My brother Ron here had a nightmare —"

"IT WASN'T A NIGHTMARE!" Ron yelled. "PROFESSOR, I WOKE UP, AND SIRIUS BLACK WAS STANDING OVER ME, HOLDING A KNIFE!"

Professor McGonagall stared at him.

"Don't be ridiculous, Weasley, how could he possibly have gotten through the portrait hole?"

"Ask him!" said Ron, pointing a shaking finger at the back of Sir Cadogan's picture. "Ask him if he saw —"

Glaring suspiciously at Ron, Professor McGonagall pushed the portrait back open and went outside. The whole common room listened with bated breath.

"Sir Cadogan, did you just let a man enter Gryffindor Tower?"

"Certainly, good lady!" cried Sir Cadogan.

There was a stunned silence, both inside and outside the common room.

"You — you *did*?" said Professor McGonagall. "But — but the password!"

"He had 'em!" said Sir Cadogan proudly. "Had the whole week's, my lady! Read 'em off a little piece of paper!"

Professor McGonagall pulled herself back through the portrait hole to face the stunned crowd. She was white as chalk.

“Which person,” she said, her voice shaking, “which abysmally foolish person wrote down this week’s passwords and left them lying around?”

There was utter silence, broken by the smallest of terrified squeaks. Neville Longbottom, trembling from head to fluffy-slipped toes, raised his hand slowly into the air.

Griffindor versus Raweklou

Dit lyk na die einde van Ron en Hermien se vriendskap. Die een is so kwaad vir die ander dat Harry nie kan sien hoe hulle ooit weer vriende gaan maak nie.

Ron is briesend omdat Hermien Kromskeen se pogings om Skille te verorber nog nooit ernstig opgeneem het nie, omdat sy nie die moeite gedoen het om hom fyn genoeg dop te hou nie, en omdat haar voorstel dat Ron onder al die seuns se beddens moet kyk of Skille nie daar is nie 'n bewys is dat sy nog steeds probeer voorgee dat Kromskeen onskuldig is. Op haar beurt hou Hermien vol dat Ron geen bewyse het dat Kromskeen vir Skille opgeëet het nie, dat die gemmerhare al sedert Krismis daar kan wees, en dat Ron bevooroordeeld is sedert Kromskeen in die Magiese Kreature-winkel op Ron se kop gespring het.

Harry is van mening dat Kromskeen vir Skille geëet het, maar toe hy Hermien probeer oortuig dat al die bewysstukke daarop dui, verloor sy haar humeur ook met Harry.

“Goed, kies Ron se kant, ek het geweet jy gaan dit doen!” sê sy skril. “Eers die Vuurslag, nou Skille, alles is my skuld, nè! Los my net uit, Harry, ek het baie werk om te doen!”

Ron kan die verlies van sy rot net nie verwerk nie.

“Komaan, Ron, jy’t nog altyd gesê hoe vervelig Skille is,” sê Fred be-moedigend, “en hy’s so lank al olik, hy’t weggekwyn. Dis eintlik beter dat hy so skielik dood is. Net een sluk – hy’t heel waarskynlik niks gevoel nie.”

“Fred!” sê Ginny verontwaardig.

“Al wat hy gedoen het, was eet en slaap, Ron, jy’t self so gesê,” sê George.

“Hy’t een keer vir Goliath gebyt!” sê Ron mistroostig. “Onthou jy, Harry?”

“Ja, dis waar,” sê Harry.

“Sy grootste oomblik,” sê Fred wat sukkel om nie te lag nie. “Mag die litteken op Goliath se vinger ’n blywende huldeblyk aan hom wees. Ag, komaan, Ron, gaan Hogsmeade toe en koop vir jou ’n nuwe rot. Dit help tog nie om te sit en kerm nie!”

In 'n laaste poging om Ron op te beur, oorreed Harry hom om saam te kom na die Griffindorspan se laaste oefensessie voor hul wedstryd teen Raweklou, sodat hy na die tyd op die Vuurslag kan vlieg. Dit lyk nogal asof *dit* Ron se aandag vir 'n rukkie van Skille aflei ("Briljant! Kan ek 'n paar doele probeer gooi?") en hulle sit saam-saam af na die Kwiddieveld.

Madame Hooch, wat nog steeds na Griffindor se oefensessies kom om 'n oë oor Harry te hou, is net so beïndruk met die Vuurslag as al die ander mense. Sy tel dit net voor die wegskop op en vergas hulle met haar professionele opinie.

"Kyk die balans! As die Nimbus-reeks 'n fout het, is dit dat die stert ietwat skeef trek – 'n mens vind dikwels dat hulle na 'n paar jaar 'n effense weerstand ontwikkel. Hulle het die steel ook vernuwe, 'n bietjie dunner as die Wegvee-reeks, laat dink my aan die ou Silver Arrows – wat 'n jammerte dat hulle nie meer vervaardig word nie, ek het op een leer vlieg, dit was werklik 'n uitmuntende besem . . ."

Sy gaan vir 'n geruime tyd op hierdie trant voort, tot Wood sê, "H'm – Madame Hooch? Is dit in orde as Harry die Vuurslag terugkry? Ons moet begin oefen . . ."

"O – goed – hierso, Potter," sê Madame Hooch. "Ek sal hier oorkant by Weasley sit . . ."

Sy en Ron stap van die veld af en gaan sit op die pawiljoen, en die Griffindorspan drom om Wood saam vir sy laaste instruksies voor die wedstryd die volgende dag.

"Harry, ek het so pas uitgevind wie vir Raweklou Soeker speel. Dis Cho Chang. Sy's 'n vierdejaar en sy's nogal goed . . . Ek hoop regtig sy kan nie speel nie, sy't 'n bietjie gesukkel met beserings . . ." Wood trek 'n gesig by die gedagte dat Cho Chang dalk ten volle herstel het, en sê, "Aan die ander kant, sy ry 'n Comet 260 wat soos 'n grap teen die Vuurslag gaan lyk." Hy kyk bewonderend na Harry se besem en sê dan, "Goed, julle, kom ons speel –"

Einde ten laaste kan Harry op sy Vuurslag klim en van die grond af wegskop.

Dit is beter as wat hy ooit kon droom. Die Vuurslag draai by die geringste aanraking, dis of dit na sy gedagtes eerder as na sy greep luister. Dit vlieg oor die veld teen so 'n spoed dat die stadion in 'n groen en grys waas verander; Harry draai met so 'n skerp es dat Alicia Spinnet skree, toe gaan hy oor in 'n perfek beheerde duikslag en skeer met sy tone oor die grasveld voor hy weer tien, twintig, dertig meter die lug in styg –

"Harry, ek gaan die Snip loslaat!" skree Wood.

Harry tol om en jaag met 'n Moker doelpale toe; hy steek hom lag-lag verby, sien hoe die Snip van agter Wood uit dartel en tien sekondes later hou hy dit styf in sy hand vas.

Die span juig oorverdwend. Harry laat die Snip weer gaan, gee dit 'n minuut se wegkomkans en sit dit dan agterna. Hy vleg deur sy spanmaats; sien waar die Snip naby Katie Bell se knie skuil, maak gemaklik 'n sirkel om haar en vang dit nog 'n keer.

Dit is die beste oefening ooit; die span, geïnspireer deur die Vuurslag se vertoning, voltooi hul moeilikste bewegings foutloos en toe hulle weer grondvat, kan Wood nie een fout vind nie, iets wat, volgens George Weasley, nog nooit tevore gebeur het nie.

“Ek kan nie sien dat iets ons môre sal kan keer nie!” sê Wood. “Behalwe as – Harry, jy’t daardie Dementorprobleem opgelos, nè?”

“Ja,” sê Harry wat aan sy flou Patronus dink en wens dat dit sterker was.

“Die Dementors sal nie weer kom nie, Oliver, Dompeldorius sal 'n oorval kry,” sê Fred vol vertroue.

“Wel; ons hoop so,” sê Wood. “In elk geval – goeie werk, julle. Kom ons gaan terug toring toe – vroeg inkruip . . .”

“Ek bly nog 'n rukkie, Ron wil die Vuurslag uitprobeer,” sê Harry vir Wood en terwyl die res van die span afsit kledkamers toe, stap Harry na Ron wat oor die versperring voor die pawiljoen spring en hom tegemoet loop. Madame Hooch het op haar sitplek aan die slaap geraak.

“Hierso,” sê Harry toe hy die Vuurslag vir Ron gee.

Met 'n uitdrukking van ekstase op sy gesig klim Ron op die besem en skiet die groeiende duisternis in, terwyl Harry om die kant van die veld loop om hom in die oog te hou. Dit is pikdonker voor Madame Hooch wakker skrik, met Harry en Ron raas omdat hulle haar nie wakker maak het nie en daarop aandrang dat hulle teruggaan kasteel toe.

Harry swaai die Vuurslag oor sy skouer en hy en Ron verlaat die stadion wat nou vol skaduwees is, terwyl hulle die Vuurslag se ongelooflike gladde aksie bespreek, sy fenomenale versnelling en die esse wat hy kan gooi. Hulle is halfpad na die kasteel toe, toe Harry na links kyk en iets sien wat sy hart bollemakiesie laat slaan – 'n paar oë wat in die donker glinster.

Harry steek in sy spore vas en sy hart slaan teen sy ribbes.

“Wat makeer?” vra Ron.

Harry wys. Ron haal sy towerstaf uit en mompel, “*Lumos!*”

'n Ligstraal val oor die gras tot teen 'n boom se stam sodat die takke verlig is, en daar, platgetrek tussen die jong blare, is Kromskeen.

“Voertsek!” brul Ron en buk om 'n klip op te tel, maar voor hy iets kan doen, het Kromskeen, met een swiep van sy lang gemmerstert, verdwyn.

“Sien?” sê Ron ergerlik toe hy die klip neersmyt. “Sy laat hom rondloop net waar hy wil – sluk seker nou vir Skille met 'n paar voëls af . . .”

Harry antwoord nie. Hy trek sy asem diep in en die verligting vloei deur hom; vir 'n oomblik het hy gedink dat daardie oë die Grim s'n is.

Hulle stap aan kasteel toe. Harry is effens skaam oor sy oomblik van paniek en sê niks vir Ron nie – hy kyk ook nie links of regs voor hulle nie binne-in die helder verligte ingangsportaal staan nie.

Die volgende oggend gaan Harry saam met die res van die seuns in sy slaapsaal af vir ontbyt. Dit lyk of almal dink dat die Vuurslag 'n soort erewag moet hê. Toe Harry die Groot Saal binnestap, draai al die koppe na die Vuurslag toe, en daar is 'n aansienlike opgewonde gebrom van stemme. Harry kry lekker toe hy sien dat die Slibberinspan totaal uit die veld geslaan lyk.

“Het jy sy gesig gesien?” sê Ron vermakerig terwyl hy omkyk na Malfoy. “Hy kan dit nie glo nie! Dit is fantasties!”

Ook Wood verlustig hom in die aandag wat die Vuurslag trek.

“Sit dit hier, Harry,” sê hy en hy sit die besem in die middel van die tafel neer en draai dit sorgvuldig om sodat die naam boontoe wys. Mense van Raweklou en Hoesenproes se tafels kom nader om te kyk. Cedric Digory kom oor om Harry geluk te wens met hierdie uitmuntende plaasvervanger vir sy Nimbus, en Percy se Raweklou-meisie, Penelope Clearwater, vra of sy die Vuurslag mag vashou.

“Toe, toe, Penny, geen sabotasie nie, hoor!” sê Percy hartlik terwyl sy die Vuurslag van naderby bekyk. “Ek en Penelope het 'n weddenskap,” sê hy vir die span. “Tien Galjoene op die wedstryd se uitslag!”

Penelope sit die Vuurslag neer, bedank vir Harry en gaan terug na haar tafel.

“Harry, maak seker dat jy wen, hoor,” sê Percy in 'n dringende fluisterstem. “Ek het nie tien Galjoene nie. Ja, ek kom, Penny!” Hy haas hom agterna om 'n stuk roosterbrood met haar te deel.

“Is jy seker jy kan daardie besem hanteer, Potter?” sê 'n koue, dralende stem.

Draco Malfoy het die besem van naderby kom bekyk, en Krabbe en Goliat is reg agter hom.

“Ja, ek dink so, wat,” sê Harry ongeërg.

“Het baie ekstras, of hoe?” sê Malfoy en sy oë skitter venynig. “Jammer dat dit nie 'n valskerm het nie – ingeval jy te na aan 'n Dementor kom.”

Krabbe en Goliat giggel.

“Jammer jy kan nie 'n ekstra arm aan joune vasmaak nie, Malfoy,” sê Harry. “Dan kan dit die Snip vir jou vang.”

Die Griffindorspan lag hard. Malfoy se bleek oë vernou en hy stap weg. Hulle kyk hoe hy by die res van die Slibberinspan aansluit en hoe hulle hul koppe bymekaar sit, seker om by Malfoy te hoor of Harry se besem regtig 'n Vuurslag is.

Teen kwart voor elf sit die Griffindorspan af kleedkamers toe. Die weer kan nie meer verskil van die dag toe hulle teen Hoesenproes gespeel het

nie. Dit is 'n helder, koue dag met 'n baie effense windjie; hierdie keer is daar geen probleme met sig nie, en hoewel Harry senuagtig is, begin hy die opgewondenheid wat net 'n Kwiddiekwedstryd kan bring, aan sy lyf voel. Hulle hoor hoe die res van die skool na die stadion kom. Harry trek sy swart skoolklere uit, haal sy towerstaf uit sy sak en steek dit in die T-hemp wat hy onder sy Kwiddiekkleed dra. Hy kan net hoop dat hy dit nie nodig gaan kry nie. Skielik wonder hy of professor Lupin ook in die skare toeskouers is.

“Julle weet wat op ons wag,” sê Wood terwyl hulle regmaak om die kleedkamer te verlaat. “As ons hierdie wedstryd verloor, is dit neusie verby. So – so vlieg net soos met gister se oefening, dan's ons oukei!”

Te midde van dāwerende applous stap hulle op die veld. Die Raweklouspan, wat blou dra, staan reeds in die middel van die veld. Hul Soeker, Cho Chang, is die enigste meisie in hul span. Sy is omtrent 'n kop korter as Harry en net so senuagtig as wat hy is. Harry kan nie anders as om te sien dat sy verskriklik mooi is nie. Toe die spanne teenoor mekaar agter hul kapteine staan, glimlag sy vir Harry en hy voel hoe iets, iewers in die omgewing van sy maag, saamtrek, iets wat niks met senuwees te doen het nie.

“Wood, Davies, skud hande,” sê Madame Hooch flink en Wood skud hand met Raweklou se kaptein.

“Klim op jul besems . . . luister vir die fluitjie . . . drie – twee – een –”

Harry skop die lug in en die Vuurslag trek hoër en vinniger as enige ander besem; hy suis om die stadion en soek na die Snip terwyl hy die hele tyd na die kommentaar luister wat deur die Weasley-tweeling se vriend, Lee Jordaan, uitgesaai word.

“Hulle is weg en die groot lekkerte van hierdie wedstryd is die Vuurslag wat deur Harry Potter van Griffindor gevlieg word. Volgens *Watter Besemstok* is die Vuurslag die eerste keuse vir die nasionale spanne by hierdie jaar se Wêreldkampioenskappe –”

“Jordaan, sal jy omgee om vir ons te vertel wat in die wedstryd aangaan?” onderbreek professor McGonagall se stem.

“Reg so, professor – gee net 'n bietjie agtergrondinligting. Terloops, die Vuurslag het ingeboude outoremme wat –”

“Jordaan!”

“Goed, goed, Griffindor in posisie, Katie Bell van Griffindor mik vir die doel . . .”

Harry skiet in die teenoorgestelde rigting verby Katie terwyl hy rondkyk vir 'n glimp van goud en oplet dat Cho Chang kort op sy hakke is. Sy is gewis 'n goeie ruiter – sy skiet aanhoudend voor hom in en dwing hom om van rigting te verander.

“Wys haar hoe jy versnel, Harry!” gil Fred toe hy verbystorm om 'n Moker wat op Alicia afpyl, agterna te sit.

Hulle vlieg om Raweklou se doelpale. Harry por die Vuurslag aan en skud vir Cho af. Katie slaag daarin om die eerste doel van die wedstryd te behaal, en die Griffindorkant van die veld juig wild; toe sien hy dit – die Snip, laag teen die grond, naby een van die versperrings.

Harry duik; Cho sien wat hy doen en sit hom agterna. Harry gaan al vinniger; die opwinding vloei deur hom; duikslae is sy spesialiteit. Hy het drie meter om te gaan –

Dan pyl 'n Moker wat deur een van Raweklou se Brekers geslaan is, asof van nêrens op hom af; Harry swenk en ontwyk dit rakelings en in daardie paar kritieke sekondes verdwyn die Snip.

Daar is 'n uitgerekte “Oeeeeee” van teleurstelling vanuit die geledere van Griffindor se ondersteuners, maar baie applous vir die Breker van Raweklou. George Weasley gee uiting aan sy gevoelens deur die tweede Moker reguit na die betrokke Breker te slaan wat hoog in die lug moet omrol om dit te vermy.

“Griffindor loop voor met tagtig punte teenoor nul, en kyk net hoe vertoon daardie Vuurslag! Potter sit hom behoorlik deur sy passies. Kyk hoe draai hy – Chang se Comet staan nie 'n kans nie. Die Vuurslag se presisiebalans is werklik opvallend in hierdie lang –”

“JORDAAN! WORD JY BETAAL OM DIE VUURSLAG TE ADVERT-
TEER OF WAT? GAAN VOORT MET DIE KOMMENTAAR!”

Raweklou val terug; hulle het reeds drie doele aangeteken, wat sorg dat Griffindor nou met slegs vyftig punte voorloop – as Cho die Snip voor hom moet kry, sal Raweklou wen. Harry sak laer, vermy 'n Raweklou-jaer nouliks, en tuur stip oor die veld: 'n Glinstering van goud, die gefladder van klein vlerkies – dis die Snip wat kringetjies om Griffindor se doelpale maak . . .

Harry versnel, sy oë vasgenael op die spikkeltjie goud daar voor – maar die volgende oomblik verskyn Cho asof uit die niet en blokkeer sy pad –

“HARRY, DAAR'S NIE TYD VIR MANIERE NIE!” brul Wood toe Harry uitswaai om 'n botsing te voorkom. “STAMP HAAR VAN HAAR BESEM AF AS JY MOET!”

Harry swaai om en sien hoe Cho vir hom lag. Die Snip het weer verdwyn. Harry stuur sy Vuurslag die lug in en is in 'n japtrap tien meter bo die spelers. Uit die hoek van sy oog sien hy dat Cho hom volg . . . sy het duidelik besluit om hom in die oog te hou eerder as om self na die Snip te soek. Goed . . . as sy op sy stert wil sit, dan moet sy die gevolge dra.

Weer duik hy, en Cho, wat oënskynlik dink dat hy die Snip gesien het, probeer hom volg. Harry trek skerp op en breek uit die draai, terwyl sy nog steeds op die grond afpyl; so vinnig soos 'n koeël uit 'n geweer styg hy op en dan sien hy dit vir die derde keer: die Snip, aan Raweklou se kant van die veld, glinsterend, ver bo die spelers.

Hy versnel; so ook Cho 'n hele paar meter onder hom. Met elke sekonde wat verbygaan, kom hy nader aan die Snip – toe –

“Oel!” skree Cho en wys na onder.

Ietwat verwilderd kyk Harry af.

Drie Dementors, drie lang, swart Dementors in kappe, kyk op na hom.

Hy dink nie twee keer nie. Hy steek sy hand voor by die nek van sy kleed in, pluk sy towerstaf uit en skreeu, “*Expecto patronum!*”

Iets wat silwerwit en yslik groot is, bars uit die punt van sy towerstaf. Hy weet dat dit reguit na die Dementors toe trek, maar wag nie om te kyk wat gebeur nie; sy gedagtes is nog ongelooflik helder, hy kyk voor hom – hy is amper daar. Hy steek die hand uit wat nog steeds die towerstaf vashou, en slaag net-net daarin om sy vingers om die spartelende Snip te vou.

Madame Hooch se fluitjie blaas, Harry tol om in die lug en sien hoe ses skarlakenrooi vorms op hom afpyl. Die volgende oomblik omhels die hele span hom met soveel entoesiasme dat hy amper van sy besem afval. Onder hom hoor hy hoe die Griffindors juig.

“Dis wonderlik!” hou Wood aan met skree. Alicia, Angelina en Katie soen al drie vir Harry en Fred het hom in so 'n stewige greep beet dat dit vir Harry voel of sy kop gaan afbreek. Toe die span uiteindelik die grond haal, is hulle in 'n totale warboel. Harry klim van sy besem af en toe hy opkyk, sien hy hoe 'n horde van Griffindor se ondersteuners op die veld hardloop met Ron aan die voorpunt. Voor hy behoorlik weet wat hom tref, is hy verswelg deur die jubelende mense.

“Jis!” gil Ron en pluk Harry se arm die lug in. “Jis! Jis!”

“Skote, Harry!” sê Percy wat hoogs in sy skik lyk. “Tien Galjoene vir my! Moet Penelope gaan soek, verskoon my –”

“Mooi so, Harry!” brul Septimus Floris.

“Flippen briljant!” bulder Hagrid oor die malende Griffindors se koppe.

“Dit was 'n merkwaardige Patronus,” sê 'n stem in Harry se oor.

Harry draai om en sien vir professor Lupin wat sowel geskok as in sy skik lyk.

“Die Dementors het niks aan my gedoen nie!” sê Harry opgewonde. “Ek het niks gevoel nie!”

“Dit kan wees omdat hulle nie – h'm – nie ware Dementors was nie,” sê professor Lupin. “Kom kyk –”

Hy lei vir Harry deur die skare totdat hulle die kant van die veld kan sien.

“Jy het mnr. Malfoy omtrent die skrik op die lyf gejaag,” sê Lupin.

Harry staar. Malfoy, Krabbe, Goliat en Marcus Flint, die Slibberinspan se kaptein, lê in 'n verfrommelde hoop op die grond en sukkel om hulself uit lang swart gewade met kappe los te wikkell. Dit lyk asof Malfoy

op Goliat se skouers gestaan het. Professor McGonagall staan dreigend oor hulle met 'n uitdrukking van uiterste woede op haar gesig.

"'n Onbetaamlike poets!" skreeu sy. "'n Lae en gemene poging om Griffindor se Soeker te saboteer! Detensie vir julle almal en Slibberin verloor vyftig punte! Ek sal met professor Dompeldorius hieroor praat, wag maar! Aha, hier kom hy nou net!"

As enigiets nodig was om Griffindor se oorwinning te beklink, dan is dit dit. Ron, wat 'n pad na Harry toe moes oopveg, skater van die lag terwyl hulle kyk hoe Malfoy stoei om uit die kleed los te kom terwyl Goliat se kop nog steeds daarin vassit.

"Kom, Harry!" sê George. "Ons moet dit vier! Griffindor-geselskamer toe, opskud!"

"Goed," sê Harry wat eeue laas so lekker gekry het, en hy en die res van die span, nog steeds in hul skarlakenrooi klere, lei almal uit die stadion en terug na die kasteel toe.

Dit voel asof hulle die Kwiddiekbeker al klaar gewen het; die partytjie gaan die hele dag aan tot diep in die nag. Fred en George Weasley verdwyn vir 'n paar uur en kom terug met arms vol bottels Botterbier, pam-poenvonkelwyn en verskeie sakke vol van Honeydukes se lekkers.

"Hoe het jy dit reggekry?" skree Angelina Johnson toe George Pepermentpaddas na die skare begin gooi.

"Met 'n bietjie hulp van Maantjie, Wurmstert, Kussingvoet en Gaffel," fluister Fred in Harry se oor.

Net een persoon neem nie aan die feestelikhede deel nie. Dis moeilik om dit te glo, maar Hermien sit in 'n hoek en probeer om 'n tamaai boek met die titel *Die Huislike Lewe en Sosiale Gewoontes van Britse Moggels* te lees. Harry verlaat die tafel waar Fred en George met Botterbierbottels begin goël het, en stap na haar toe.

"Was jy ooit by die wedstryd?" vra hy.

"Natuurlik was ek," sê Hermien in 'n vreemde, skril stemmetjie sonder om op te kyk. "En ek is baie bly dat ons gewen het en ek dink jy was werklik baie goed, maar ek moet hierdie boek teen Maandag klaar gelees he."

"Komaan, Hermien, kom kry kos," sê Harry terwyl hy na Ron loer en wonder of sy bui goed genoeg is dat hy die strydbyl sal begrawe.

"Ek kan nie, Harry, ek moet nog vierhonderd-twee-en-twintig bladsye lees!" sê Hermien wat nou effens histories klink. "In elk geval..." sy loer na Ron, "hy wil my nie daar hê nie."

Daaroor is daar geen twyfel nie, want Ron kies hierdie presiese oomblik om luidkeels te sê, "As Skille nie geëet was nie, kon hy ook van hierdie Fudgevlieë gekry het, hy was mal daaroor—"

Hermien bars in tranes uit. Voor Harry iets kan sê of doen, druk sy die

enorme boek onder haar arm in en hardloop, nog steeds snikkend; na die wenteltrap wat na die meisies se slaapsaal lei.

“Was dit nou nodig?” vra Harry onderlangs vir Ron.

“Ja,” sê Ron pront. “As sy net sal maak of sy jammer is – maar Hermien sal nooit erken dat sy verkeerd is nie. Sy maak nog steeds of Skille net met vakansie is of iets.”

Die Griffindors se partytjie kom eers tot ’n einde toe professor McGonagall, in ’n tartankamerjas en ’n haarnet, teen eenuur die oggend opdaag en daarop aandrung dat almal bed toe gaan. Toe Harry en Ron die trappe uitklim, bespreek hulle die wedstryd nog eenstryk deur. Harry is pootuit toe hy uiteindelik in die bed klim. Hy trek die behangsels om sy hemelbed dig toe om ’n maanligstraal te keer, gaan lê op die naat van sy rug en dommel amper onmiddellik weg . . .

Hy het ’n baie eienaardige droom. Hy loop met sy Vuurslag oor sy skouer agter iets aan wat silwerig wit van kleur is. Dit vleg deur die bome voor hom sodat hy net nou en dan ’n glimp daarvan tussen die blare kry. Hy is gretig om dit in te haal en stap vinniger, maar sy prooi versnel ook sy pas. Harry begin hardloop, hy hoor hoewe voor hom wat al vinniger beweeg. Nou hardloop hy voluit; voor hom hoor hy iets galop. Hy gaan om ’n draai, daar is ’n oopte voor hom en –

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARRRGGGG! NEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!”

Harry word so skielik wakker dat dit voel asof hy deur die gesig geslaan is. Half in ’n dwaal en in die stikdonkerte vroetel hy met sy behangsels – hy kan bewegings om hom hoor en Septimus Floris se stem aan die oorkant van die kamer.

“Wat gaan aan?”

Harry verbeel hom dat hy die deur van ’n slaapsaal hoor toeslaan. Uiteindelik kry hy die verdeling waar sy gordyne bymekaar kom en pluk hulle oop, en op daardie selfde oomblik steek Dean Thomas ’n lamp aan.

Ron sit regop op sy bed met ’n uitdrukking van absolute vrees op sy gesig. Die behangsels aan die een kant is geskeur.

“Swardt! Sirius Swardt! Met ’n mes!”

“Wat?”

“Hier! Nou net! Het die gordyne gesny! My wakker gemaak!”

“Is jy seker jy’t nie gedroom nie, Ron?” sê Dean.

“Kyk na die gordyne! Ek sê jou hy was hier!”

Hulle spring uit die bed; Harry is eerste by die slaapsaal se deur en hulle hardloop af met die trappe. Agter hulle gaan deure oop en slaperige stemme roep agter hulle aan.

“Wie’t so geskree?”

“Wat maak julle?”

Die geselskamer is verlig deur die gloed van die sterwende vuur en besaai met die oorblyfsels van die partytjie. Daar is egter niemand nie.

"Is jy seker jy't nie gedroom nie, Ron?"

"Ek sê julle, ek het hom gesien!"

"Watse geraas is dit?"

"Professor McGonagall! het gesê ons moet bed toe gaan!"

'n Paar van die meisies kom gaap-gaap by hul trappe af. Hulle trek nog hul kamerjasse aan. Van die seuns maak ook hul verskyning.

"Lekker, gaan ons aan?" sê Fred Weasley vrolik.

"Almal terug boontoe!" sê Percy wat die geselskamer haastig binnekom en nog sy Hoofseunwapentjie aan sy pajamas vassteek.

"Percy – Sirius Swardt!" sê Ron floutjies. "In ons slaapsaal! Met 'n mes! Het my wakker gemaak!"

Die geselskamer word tjoepstil.

"Bog!" sê Percy, maar hy lyk verskrik. "Jy't te veel geëet, Ron – 'n nagmerrie gehad –"

"Ek sê jou –"

"Dit is werklik verregaande!"

Professor McGonagall is terug. Toe sy die geselskamer binnekom, slaan sy die portret agter haar toe en kyk woedend om haar rond.

"Ek is verheug dat Griffindor die wedstryd gewen het, maar dit is werklik te erg! Percy, ek het dit nie van jou verwag nie!"

"Ek keur dit beslis nie goed nie, professor!" sê Percy en pof homself verontwaardig op. "Ek het nou net vir hulle almal gesê om bed toe te gaan! My broer Ron het 'n nagmerrie –"

"DIT WAS NIE 'N NAGMERRIE NIE!" gil Ron. "PROFESSOR, EK HET WAKKER GEWORD EN SIRIUS SWARDT HET LANGS MY GESTAAN MET 'N MES IN SY HAND!"

Professor McGonagall kyk stip na hom.

"Moenie verspot wees nie, Weasley, hoe op aarde het hy deur die portretopening gekom?"

"Vra vir hom!" sê Ron en wys met 'n bewende vinger na die agterkant van sir Cadogan se skildery. "Vra hom wat hy gesien het –"

Terwyl sy agterdogtig na Ron loer, stoot professor McGonagall die portret oop en gaan buitentoe. Die hele geselskamer luister met ingehoue asem.

"Sir Cadogan, het jy so pas 'n man by die Griffindortoring ingelaat?"

"Sekerlik, my liewe dame!" roep sir Cadogan uit.

Daar is 'n geskokte stilte, sowel binne as buite die geselskamer.

"Jy – jy het?" sê professor McGonagall. "Maar – maar die wagwoord!"

"Hy het dit gehad!" sê sir Cadogan in sy skik. "Het die hele week s'n gehad, my liewe dame! Het dit van 'n stukkie papier afgelees!"

Professor McGonagall hys haarself terug deur die portretopening en tuur na die dronkgeslane skare mense. Sy is so wit soos kryt.

"Watter persoon," sê sy en haar stem bewe, "watter ongelooflik onno-

sele persoon het hierdie week se wagwoorde neergeskryf en iewers laat rondlê?"

Daar is 'n volslae stilte wat deur die kleinste, benoudste piepgeluidjie verbreek word. Neville Loggerenberg, wat van sy kop tot by die tone van sy wollerige pantoffels staan en bewe, se hand gaan stadig die lug in.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN



SNAPE'S GRUDGE

No one in Gryffindor Tower slept that night. They knew that the castle was being searched again, and the whole House stayed awake in the common room, waiting to hear whether Black had been caught. Professor McGonagall came back at dawn, to tell them that he had again escaped.

Throughout the day, everywhere they went they saw signs of tighter security; Professor Flitwick could be seen teaching the front doors to recognize a large picture of Sirius Black; Filch was suddenly bustling up and down the corridors, boarding up everything from tiny cracks in the walls to mouse holes. Sir Cadogan had been fired. His portrait had been taken back to its lonely landing on the seventh floor, and the Fat Lady was back. She had been expertly restored, but was still extremely nervous, and had agreed to return to her job only on

condition that she was given extra protection. A bunch of surly security trolls had been hired to guard her. They paced the corridor in a menacing group, talking in grunts and comparing the size of their clubs.

Harry couldn't help noticing that the statue of the one-eyed witch on the third floor remained unguarded and unblocked. It seemed that Fred and George had been right in thinking that they — and now Harry, Ron, and Hermione — were the only ones who knew about the hidden passageway within it.

“D’you reckon we should tell someone?” Harry asked Ron.

“We know he’s not coming in through Honeydukes,” said Ron dismissively. “We’d’ve heard if the shop had been broken into.”

Harry was glad Ron took this view. If the one-eyed witch was boarded up too, he would never be able to go into Hogsmeade again.

Ron had become an instant celebrity. For the first time in his life, people were paying more attention to him than to Harry, and it was clear that Ron was rather enjoying the experience. Though still severely shaken by the night’s events, he was happy to tell anyone who asked what had happened, with a wealth of detail.

“... I was asleep, and I heard this ripping noise, and I thought it was in my dream, you know? But then there was this draft... I woke up and one side of the hangings on my bed had been pulled down... I rolled over... and I saw him standing over me... like a skeleton, with loads of filthy hair... holding this great long knife, must’ve been twelve inches... and he looked at me, and I looked at him, and then I yelled, and he *scampered*.

“Why, though?” Ron added to Harry as the group of second-year

girls who had been listening to his chilling tale departed. “Why did he run?”

Harry had been wondering the same thing. Why had Black, having got the wrong bed, not silenced Ron and proceeded to Harry? Black had proved twelve years ago that he didn’t mind murdering innocent people, and this time he had been facing five unarmed boys, four of whom were asleep.

“He must’ve known he’d have a job getting back out of the castle once you’d yelled and woken people up,” said Harry thoughtfully. “He’d’ve had to kill the whole House to get back through the portrait hole . . . then he would’ve met the teachers. . . .”

Neville was in total disgrace. Professor McGonagall was so furious with him she had banned him from all future Hogsmeade visits, given him a detention, and forbidden anyone to give him the password into the tower. Poor Neville was forced to wait outside the common room every night for somebody to let him in, while the security trolls leered unpleasantly at him. None of these punishments, however, came close to matching the one his grandmother had in store for him. Two days after Black’s break-in, she sent Neville the very worst thing a Hogwarts student could receive over breakfast — a Howler.

The school owls swooped into the Great Hall carrying the mail as usual, and Neville choked as a huge barn owl landed in front of him, a scarlet envelope clutched in its beak. Harry and Ron, who were sitting opposite him, recognized the letter as a Howler at once — Ron had got one from his mother the year before.

“Run for it, Neville,” Ron advised.

Neville didn't need telling twice. He seized the envelope, and holding it before him like a bomb, sprinted out of the hall, while the Slytherin table exploded with laughter at the sight of him. They heard the Howler go off in the entrance hall — Neville's grandmother's voice, magically magnified to a hundred times its usual volume, shrieking about how he had brought shame on the whole family.

Harry was too busy feeling sorry for Neville to notice immediately that he had a letter too. Hedwig got his attention by nipping him sharply on the wrist.

"Ouch! Oh — thanks, Hedwig."

Harry tore open the envelope while Hedwig helped herself to some of Neville's cornflakes. The note inside said:

Dear Harry and Ron,

How about having tea with me this afternoon 'round six?

I'll come and collect you from the castle.

**WAIT FOR ME IN THE ENTRANCE HALL; YOU'RE NOT
ALLOWED OUT ON YOUR OWN.**

Cheers,

Hagrid

"He probably wants to hear all about Black!" said Ron.

So at six o'clock that afternoon, Harry and Ron left Gryffindor Tower, passed the security trolls at a run, and headed down to the entrance hall.

Hagrid was already waiting for them.

"All right, Hagrid!" said Ron. "S'pose you want to hear about Saturday night, do you?"

"I've already heard all about it," said Hagrid, opening the front doors and leading them outside.

"Oh," said Ron, looking slightly put out.

The first thing they saw on entering Hagrid's cabin was Buckbeak, who was stretched out on top of Hagrid's patchwork quilt, his enormous wings folded tight to his body, enjoying a large plate of dead ferrets. Averting his eyes from this unpleasant sight, Harry saw a gigantic, hairy brown suit and a very horrible yellow-and-orange tie hanging from the top of Hagrid's wardrobe door.

"What are they for, Hagrid?" said Harry.

"Buckbeak's case against the Committee for the Disposal of Dangerous Creatures," said Hagrid. "This Friday. Him an' me'll be goin' down ter London together. I've booked two beds on the Knight Bus. . . ."

Harry felt a nasty pang of guilt. He had completely forgotten that Buckbeak's trial was so near, and judging by the uneasy look on Ron's face, he had too. They had also forgotten their promise about helping him prepare Buckbeak's defense; the arrival of the Firebolt had driven it clean out of their minds.

Hagrid poured them tea and offered them a plate of Bath buns, but they knew better than to accept; they had had too much experience with Hagrid's cooking.

"I got somethin' ter discuss with you two," said Hagrid, sitting himself between them and looking uncharacteristically serious.

"What?" said Harry.

"Hermione," said Hagrid.

"What about her?" said Ron.

“She’s in a righ’ state, that’s what. She’s bin comin’ down ter visit me a lot since Chris’ mas. Bin feelin’ lonely. Firs’ yeh weren’ talking to her because o’ the Firebolt, now yer not talkin’ to her because her cat —”

“— ate Scabbers!” Ron interjected angrily.

“Because her cat acted like all cats do,” Hagrid continued doggedly. “She’s cried a fair few times, yeh know. Goin’ through a rough time at the moment. Bitten off more’n she can chew, if yeh ask me, all the work she’s tryin’ ter do. Still found time ter help me with Buckbeak’s case, mind. . . . She’s found some really good stuff fer me . . . reckon he’ll stand a good chance now. . . .”

“Hagrid, we should’ve helped as well — sorry —” Harry began awkwardly.

“I’m not blamin’ yeh!” said Hagrid, waving Harry’s apology aside. “Gawd knows yeh’ve had enough ter be gettin’ on with. I’ve seen yeh practicin’ Quidditch ev’ry hour o’ the day an’ night — but I gotta tell yeh, I thought you two’d value yer friend more’n broomsticks or rats. Tha’s all.”

Harry and Ron exchanged uncomfortable looks.

“Really upset, she was, when Black nearly stabbed yeh, Ron. She’s got her heart in the right place, Hermione has, an’ you two not talkin’ to her —”

“If she’d just get rid of that cat, I’d speak to her again!” Ron said angrily. “But she’s still sticking up for it! It’s a maniac, and she won’t hear a word against it!”

“Ah, well, people can be a bit stupid abou’ their pets,” said Hagrid wisely. Behind him, Buckbeak spat a few ferret bones onto

Hagrid's pillow.

They spent the rest of their visit discussing Gryffindor's improved chances for the Quidditch Cup. At nine o'clock, Hagrid walked them back up to the castle.

A large group of people was bunched around the bulletin board when they returned to the common room.

"Hogsmeade, next weekend!" said Ron, craning over the heads to read the new notice. "What d'you reckon?" he added quietly to Harry as they went to sit down.

"Well, Filch hasn't done anything about the passage into Honeydukes. . . ." Harry said, even more quietly.

"Harry!" said a voice in his right ear. Harry started and looked around at Hermione, who was sitting at the table right behind them and clearing a space in the wall of books that had been hiding her.

"Harry, if you go into Hogsmeade again . . . I'll tell Professor McGonagall about that map!" said Hermione.

"Can you hear someone talking, Harry?" growled Ron, not looking at Hermione.

"Ron, how can you let him go with you? After what Sirius Black nearly did to *you*! I mean it, I'll tell —"

"So now you're trying to get Harry expelled!" said Ron furiously. "Haven't you done enough damage this year?"

Hermione opened her mouth to respond, but with a soft hiss, Crookshanks leapt onto her lap. Hermione took one frightened look at the expression on Ron's face, gathered up Crookshanks, and hurried away toward the girls' dormitories.

"So how about it?" Ron said to Harry as though there had been no

interruption. "Come on, last time we went you didn't see anything. You haven't even been inside Zonko's yet!"

Harry looked around to check that Hermione was well out of earshot.

"Okay," he said. "But I'm taking the Invisibility Cloak this time."

On Saturday morning, Harry packed his Invisibility Cloak in his bag, slipped the Marauder's Map into his pocket, and went down to breakfast with everyone else. Hermione kept shooting suspicious looks down the table at him, but he avoided her eye and was careful to let her see him walking back up the marble staircase in the entrance hall as everybody else proceeded to the front doors.

"Bye!" Harry called to Ron. "See you when you get back!"

Ron grinned and winked.

Harry hurried up to the third floor, slipping the Marauder's Map out of his pocket as he went. Crouching behind the one-eyed witch, he smoothed it out. A tiny dot was moving in his direction. Harry squinted at it. The minuscule writing next to it read *Neville Longbottom*.

Harry quickly pulled out his wand, muttered, "*Dissendium!*" and shoved his bag into the statue, but before he could climb in himself, Neville came around the corner.

"Harry! I forgot you weren't going to Hogsmeade either!"

"Hi, Neville," said Harry, moving swiftly away from the statue and pushing the map back into his pocket. "What are you up to?"

"Nothing," shrugged Neville. "Want a game of Exploding Snap?"

"Er — not now — I was going to go to the library and do that

vampire essay for Lupin —”

“I’ll come with you!” said Neville brightly. “I haven’t done it either!”

“Er — hang on — yeah, I forgot, I finished it last night!”

“Great, you can help me!” said Neville, his round face anxious. “I don’t understand that thing about the garlic at all — do they have to eat it, or —”

He broke off with a small gasp, looking over Harry’s shoulder.

It was Snape. Neville took a quick step behind Harry.

“And what are you two doing here?” said Snape, coming to a halt and looking from one to the other. “An odd place to meet —”

To Harry’s immense disquiet, Snape’s black eyes flicked to the doorways on either side of them, and then to the one-eyed witch.

“We’re not — meeting here,” said Harry. “We just — met here.”

“Indeed?” said Snape. “You have a habit of turning up in unexpected places, Potter, and you are very rarely there for no reason. . . . I suggest the pair of you return to Gryffindor Tower, where you belong.”

Harry and Neville set off without another word. As they turned the corner, Harry looked back. Snape was running one of his hands over the one-eyed witch’s head, examining it closely.

Harry managed to shake Neville off at the Fat Lady by telling him the password, then pretending he’d left his vampire essay in the library and doubling back. Once out of sight of the security trolls, he pulled out the map again and held it close to his nose.

The third-floor corridor seemed to be deserted. Harry scanned the map carefully and saw, with a leap of relief, that the tiny dot labeled

Severus Snape was now back in its office.

He sprinted back to the one-eyed witch, opened her hump, heaved himself inside, and slid down to meet his bag at the bottom of the stone chute. He wiped the Marauder's Map blank again, then set off at a run.

Harry, completely hidden beneath the Invisibility Cloak, emerged into the sunlight outside Honeydukes and prodded Ron in the back.

"It's me," he muttered.

"What kept you?" Ron hissed.

"Snape was hanging around. . . ."

They set off up the High Street.

"Where are you?" Ron kept muttering out of the corner of his mouth. "Are you still there? This feels weird. . . ."

They went to the post office; Ron pretended to be checking the price of an owl to Bill in Egypt so that Harry could have a good look around. The owls sat hooting softly down at him, at least three hundred of them; from Great Grays right down to tiny little Scops owls ("Local Deliveries Only"), which were so small they could have sat in the palm of Harry's hand.

Then they visited Zonko's, which was so packed with students Harry had to exercise great care not to tread on anyone and cause a panic. There were jokes and tricks to fulfill even Fred's and George's wildest dreams; Harry gave Ron whispered orders and passed him some gold from under the Cloak. They left Zonko's with their money bags considerably lighter than they had been on entering, but their pockets bulging with Dungbombs, Hiccup Sweets, Frog

Spawn Soap, and a Nose-Biting Teacup apiece.

The day was fine and breezy, and neither of them felt like staying indoors, so they walked past the Three Broomsticks and climbed a slope to visit the Shrieking Shack, the most haunted dwelling in Britain. It stood a little way above the rest of the village, and even in daylight was slightly creepy, with its boarded windows and dank overgrown garden.

“Even the Hogwarts ghosts avoid it,” said Ron as they leaned on the fence, looking up at it. “I asked Nearly Headless Nick . . . he says he’s heard a very rough crowd lives here. No one can get in. Fred and George tried, obviously, but all the entrances are sealed shut. . . .”

Harry, feeling hot from their climb, was just considering taking off the Cloak for a few minutes when they heard voices nearby. Someone was climbing toward the house from the other side of the hill; moments later, Malfoy had appeared, followed closely by Crabbe and Goyle. Malfoy was speaking.

“ . . . should have an owl from Father any time now. He had to go to the hearing to tell them about my arm . . . about how I couldn’t use it for three months. . . .”

Crabbe and Goyle sniggered.

“I really wish I could hear that great hairy moron trying to defend himself . . . ‘There’s no ’arm in ’im, ’onest —’ . . . that hippogriff’s as good as dead —”

Malfoy suddenly caught sight of Ron. His pale face split in a malevolent grin.

“What are you doing, Weasley?”

Malfoy looked up at the crumbling house behind Ron.

“Suppose you’d love to live here, wouldn’t you, Weasley? Dreaming about having your own bedroom? I heard your family all sleep in one room — is that true?”

Harry seized the back of Ron’s robes to stop him from leaping on Malfoy.

“Leave him to me,” he hissed in Ron’s ear.

The opportunity was too perfect to miss. Harry crept silently around behind Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle, bent down, and scooped a large handful of mud out of the path.

“We were just discussing your friend Hagrid,” Malfoy said to Ron. “Just trying to imagine what he’s saying to the Committee for the Disposal of Dangerous Creatures. D’you think he’ll cry when they cut off his hippogriff’s —”

SPLAT.

Malfoy’s head jerked forward as the mud hit him; his silver-blond hair was suddenly dripping in muck.

“What the — ?”

Ron had to hold onto the fence to keep himself standing, he was laughing so hard. Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle spun stupidly on the spot, staring wildly around, Malfoy trying to wipe his hair clean.

“What was that? Who did that?”

“Very haunted up here, isn’t it?” said Ron, with the air of one commenting on the weather.

Crabbe and Goyle were looking scared. Their bulging muscles were no use against ghosts. Malfoy was staring madly around at the deserted landscape.

Harry sneaked along the path, where a particularly sloppy puddle yielded some foul-smelling, green sludge.

SPLATTER.

Crabbe and Goyle caught some this time. Goyle hopped furiously on the spot, trying to rub it out of his small, dull eyes.

“It came from over there!” said Malfoy, wiping his face, and staring at a spot some six feet to the left of Harry.

Crabbe blundered forward, his long arms outstretched like a zombie. Harry dodged around him, picked up a stick, and lobbed it at Crabbe’s back. Harry doubled up with silent laughter as Crabbe did a kind of pirouette in midair, trying to see who had thrown it. As Ron was the only person Crabbe could see, it was Ron he started toward, but Harry stuck out his leg. Crabbe stumbled — and his huge, flat foot caught the hem of Harry’s Cloak. Harry felt a great tug, then the Cloak slid off his face.

For a split second, Malfoy stared at him.

“AAARGH!” he yelled, pointing at Harry’s head. Then he turned tail and ran, at breakneck speed, back down the hill, Crabbe and Goyle behind him.

Harry tugged the Cloak up again, but the damage was done.

“Harry!” Ron said, stumbling forward and staring hopelessly at the point where Harry had disappeared, “you’d better run for it! If Malfoy tells anyone — you’d better get back to the castle, quick —”

“See you later,” said Harry, and without another word, he tore back down the path toward Hogsmeade.

Would Malfoy believe what he had seen? Would anyone believe Malfoy? Nobody knew about the Invisibility Cloak — nobody except

Dumbledore. Harry's stomach turned over — Dumbledore would know exactly what had happened, if Malfoy said anything —

Back into Honeydukes, back down the cellar steps, across the stone floor, through the trapdoor — Harry pulled off the Cloak, tucked it under his arm, and ran, flat out, along the passage. Malfoy would get back first . . . how long would it take him to find a teacher? Panting, a sharp pain in his side, Harry didn't slow down until he reached the stone slide. He would have to leave the Cloak where it was, it was too much of a giveaway in case Malfoy had tipped off a teacher — he hid it in a shadowy corner, then started to climb, fast as he could, his sweaty hands slipping on the sides of the chute. He reached the inside of the witch's hump, tapped it with his wand, stuck his head through, and hoisted himself out; the hump closed, and just as Harry jumped out from behind the statue, he heard quick footsteps approaching.

It was Snape. He approached Harry at a swift walk, his black robes swishing, then stopped in front of him.

“So,” he said.

There was a look of suppressed triumph about him. Harry tried to look innocent, all too aware of his sweaty face and his muddy hands, which he quickly hid in his pockets.

“Come with me, Potter,” said Snape.

Harry followed him downstairs, trying to wipe his hands clean on the inside of his robes without Snape noticing. They walked down the stairs to the dungeons and then into Snape's office.

Harry had been in here only once before, and he had been in very serious trouble then too. Snape had acquired a few more slimy

horrible things in jars since last time, all standing on shelves behind his desk, glinting in the firelight and adding to the threatening atmosphere.

“Sit,” said Snape.

Harry sat. Snape, however, remained standing.

“Mr. Malfoy has just been to see me with a strange story, Potter,” said Snape.

Harry didn’t say anything.

“He tells me that he was up by the Shrieking Shack when he ran into Weasley — apparently alone.”

Still, Harry didn’t speak.

“Mr. Malfoy states that he was standing talking to Weasley, when a large amount of mud hit him in the back of the head. How do you think that could have happened?”

Harry tried to look mildly surprised.

“I don’t know, Professor.”

Snape’s eyes were boring into Harry’s. It was exactly like trying to stare down a hippogriff. Harry tried hard not to blink.

“Mr. Malfoy then saw an extraordinary apparition. Can you imagine what it might have been, Potter?”

“No,” said Harry, now trying to sound innocently curious.

“It was your head, Potter. Floating in midair.”

There was a long silence.

“Maybe he’d better go to Madam Pomfrey,” said Harry. “If he’s seeing things like —”

“What would your head have been doing in Hogsmeade, Potter?”

said Snape softly. "Your head is not allowed in Hogsmeade. No part of your body has permission to be in Hogsmeade."

"I know that," said Harry, striving to keep his face free of guilt or fear. "It sounds like Malfoy's having hallucin —"

"Malfoy is not having hallucinations," snarled Snape, and he bent down, a hand on each arm of Harry's chair, so that their faces were a foot apart. "If your head was in Hogsmeade, so was the rest of you."

"I've been up in Gryffindor Tower," said Harry. "Like you told —"

"Can anyone confirm that?"

Harry didn't say anything. Snape's thin mouth curled into a horrible smile.

"So," he said, straightening up again. "Everyone from the Minister of Magic downward has been trying to keep famous Harry Potter safe from Sirius Black. But famous Harry Potter is a law unto himself. Let the ordinary people worry about his safety! Famous Harry Potter goes where he wants to, with no thought for the consequences."

Harry stayed silent. Snape was trying to provoke him into telling the truth. He wasn't going to do it. Snape had no proof — yet.

"How extraordinarily like your father you are, Potter," Snape said suddenly, his eyes glinting. "He too was exceedingly arrogant. A small amount of talent on the Quidditch field made him think he was a cut above the rest of us too. Strutting around the place with his friends and admirers . . . The resemblance between you is uncanny."

"My dad didn't *strut*," said Harry, before he could stop himself. "And neither do I."

"Your father didn't set much store by rules either," Snape went on,

pressing his advantage, his thin face full of malice. "Rules were for lesser mortals, not Quidditch Cup-winners. His head was so swollen —"

"SHUT UP!"

Harry was suddenly on his feet. Rage such as he had not felt since his last night in Privet Drive was coursing through him. He didn't care that Snape's face had gone rigid, the black eyes flashing dangerously.

"What did you say to me, Potter?"

"I told you to shut up about my dad!" Harry yelled. "I know the truth, all right? He saved your life! Dumbledore told me! You wouldn't even be here if it wasn't for my dad!"

Snape's sallow skin had gone the color of sour milk.

"And did the headmaster tell you the circumstances in which your father saved my life?" he whispered. "Or did he consider the details too unpleasant for precious Potter's delicate ears?"

Harry bit his lip. He didn't know what had happened and didn't want to admit it — but Snape seemed to have guessed the truth.

"I would hate for you to run away with a false idea of your father, Potter," he said, a terrible grin twisting his face. "Have you been imagining some act of glorious heroism? Then let me correct you — your saintly father and his friends played a highly amusing joke on me that would have resulted in my death if your father hadn't got cold feet at the last moment. There was nothing brave about what he did. He was saving his own skin as much as mine. Had their joke succeeded, he would have been expelled from Hogwarts."

Snape's uneven, yellowish teeth were bared.

“Turn out your pockets, Potter!” he spat suddenly.

Harry didn’t move. There was a pounding in his ears.

“Turn out your pockets, or we go straight to the headmaster! Pull them out, Potter!”

Cold with dread, Harry slowly pulled out the bag of Zonko’s tricks and the Marauder’s Map.

Snape picked up the Zonko’s bag.

“Ron gave them to me,” said Harry, praying he’d get a chance to tip Ron off before Snape saw him. “He — brought them back from Hogsmeade last time —”

“Indeed? And you’ve been carrying them around ever since? How very touching . . . and what is this?”

Snape had picked up the map. Harry tried with all his might to keep his face impassive.

“Spare bit of parchment,” he said with a shrug.

Snape turned it over, his eyes on Harry.

“Surely you don’t need such a very *old* piece of parchment?” he said. “Why don’t I just — throw this away?”

His hand moved toward the fire.

“No!” Harry said quickly.

“So!” said Snape, his long nostrils quivering. “Is this another treasured gift from Mr. Weasley? Or is it — something else? A letter, perhaps, written in invisible ink? Or — instructions to get into Hogsmeade without passing the dementors?”

Harry blinked. Snape’s eyes gleamed.

“Let me see, let me see . . .,” he muttered, taking out his wand and

smoothing the map out on his desk. "Reveal your secret!" he said, touching the wand to the parchment.

Nothing happened. Harry clenched his hands to stop them from shaking.

"Show yourself!" Snape said, tapping the map sharply.

It stayed blank. Harry was taking deep, calming breaths.

"Professor Severus Snape, master of this school, commands you to yield the information you conceal!" Snape said, hitting the map with his wand.

As though an invisible hand were writing upon it, words appeared on the smooth surface of the map.

"Mr. Moony presents his compliments to Professor Snape, and begs him to keep his abnormally large nose out of other people's business."

Snape froze. Harry stared, dumbstruck, at the message. But the map didn't stop there. More writing was appearing beneath the first.

"Mr. Prongs agrees with Mr. Moony, and would like to add that Professor Snape is an ugly git."

It would have been very funny if the situation hadn't been so serious. And there was more. . . .

"Mr. Padfoot would like to register his astonishment that an idiot like that ever became a professor."

Harry closed his eyes in horror. When he'd opened them, the map had had its last word.

"Mr. Wormtail bids Professor Snape good day, and advises him to wash his hair, the slimeball."

Harry waited for the blow to fall.

“So . . . ,” said Snape softly. “We’ll see about this. . . .”

He strode across to his fire, seized a fistful of glittering powder from a jar on the fireplace, and threw it into the flames.

“Lupin!” Snape called into the fire. “I want a word!”

Utterly bewildered, Harry stared at the fire. A large shape had appeared in it, revolving very fast. Seconds later, Professor Lupin was clambering out of the fireplace, brushing ash off his shabby robes.

“You called, Severus?” said Lupin mildly.

“I certainly did,” said Snape, his face contorted with fury as he strode back to his desk. “I have just asked Potter to empty his pockets. He was carrying this.”

Snape pointed at the parchment, on which the words of Messrs. Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, and Prongs were still shining. An odd, closed expression appeared on Lupin’s face.

“Well?” said Snape.

Lupin continued to stare at the map. Harry had the impression that Lupin was doing some very quick thinking.

“*Well?*” said Snape again. “This parchment is plainly full of Dark Magic. This is supposed to be your area of expertise, Lupin. Where do you imagine Potter got such a thing?”

Lupin looked up and, by the merest half-glance in Harry’s direction, warned him not to interrupt.

“Full of Dark Magic?” he repeated mildly. “Do you really think so, Severus? It looks to me as though it is merely a piece of parchment that insults anybody who reads it. Childish, but surely not dangerous? I imagine Harry got it from a joke shop —”

“Indeed?” said Snape. His jaw had gone rigid with anger. “You think a joke shop could supply him with such a thing? You don’t think it more likely that he got it *directly from the manufacturers*?”

Harry didn’t understand what Snape was talking about. Nor, apparently, did Lupin.

“You mean, by Mr. Wormtail or one of these people?” he said. “Harry, do you know any of these men?”

“No,” said Harry quickly.

“You see, Severus?” said Lupin, turning back to Snape. “It looks like a Zonko product to me —”

Right on cue, Ron came bursting into the office. He was completely out of breath, and stopped just short of Snape’s desk, clutching the stitch in his chest and trying to speak.

“I — gave — Harry — that — stuff,” he choked. “Bought — it in Zonko’s . . . ages — ago . . .”

“Well!” said Lupin, clapping his hands together and looking around cheerfully. “That seems to clear that up! Severus, I’ll take this back, shall I?” He folded the map and tucked it inside his robes. “Harry, Ron, come with me, I need a word about my vampire essay — excuse us, Severus —”

Harry didn’t dare look at Snape as they left his office. He, Ron, and Lupin walked all the way back into the entrance hall before speaking. Then Harry turned to Lupin.

“Professor, I —”

“I don’t want to hear explanations,” said Lupin shortly. He glanced around the empty entrance hall and lowered his voice. “I happen to know that this map was confiscated by Mr. Filch many years ago.

Yes, I know it's a map," he said as Harry and Ron looked amazed. "I don't want to know how it fell into your possession. I am, however, *astounded* that you didn't hand it in. Particularly after what happened the last time a student left information about the castle lying around. And I can't let you have it back, Harry."

Harry had expected that, and was too keen for explanations to protest.

"Why did Snape think I'd got it from the manufacturers?"

"Because . . .," Lupin hesitated, "because these mapmakers would have wanted to lure you out of school. They'd think it extremely entertaining."

"Do you *know* them?" said Harry, impressed.

"We've met," he said shortly. He was looking at Harry more seriously than ever before.

"Don't expect me to cover up for you again, Harry. I cannot make you take Sirius Black seriously. But I would have thought that what you have heard when the dementors draw near you would have had more of an effect on you. Your parents gave their lives to keep you alive, Harry. A poor way to repay them — gambling their sacrifice for a bag of magic tricks."

He walked away, leaving Harry feeling worse by far than he had at any point in Snape's office. Slowly, he and Ron mounted the marble staircase. As Harry passed the one-eyed witch, he remembered the Invisibility Cloak — it was still down there, but he didn't dare go and get it.

"It's my fault," said Ron abruptly. "I persuaded you to go. Lupin's right, it was stupid, we shouldn't've done it —"

He broke off; they reached the corridor where the security trolls were pacing, and Hermione was walking toward them. One look at her face convinced Harry that she had heard what had happened. His heart plummeted — had she told Professor McGonagall?

“Come to have a good gloat?” said Ron savagely as she stopped in front of them. “Or have you just been to tell on us?”

“No,” said Hermione. She was holding a letter in her hands and her lip was trembling. “I just thought you ought to know . . . Hagrid lost his case. Buckbeak is going to be executed.”

Snerp se Grief

Daardie nag slaap niemand in die Griffindortoring nie. Almal weet dat die kasteel weer deursoek word, en die hele huis sit penorent in die geselskamer en wag om te hoor of Swardt wel gevang is of nie. Teen dagbreek kom professor McGonagall terug om te sê dat hy weer eens ontsnap het.

Oral waar hulle die volgende dag gaan, sien hulle tekens van verhoogde sekuriteit; professor Flickerpitt kan gesien word waar hy die voordeure leer om 'n groot foto van Sirius Swardt te herken; Fillis skarrel skielik op en af in die gange en spyker alles toe, van klein krakies in die mure tot muisgate. Sir Cadogan is ontslaan. Sy portret is teruggeneem na die eensame trapportaal op die sewende verdieping en die Vet Vrou is terug. Sy is kundig gerestoureer, maar is nog steeds uiters senuagtig en het net ingestem om weer haar pos te vul op voorwaarde dat daar ekstra beskerming vir haar sal wees. 'n Paar knorrige sekuriteitstrolle is gehuur om haar op te pas. Hulle marsjeer in 'n dreigende groep op en af in die gang, grom as hulle praat, en stry oor wie die grootste knuppel het.

Harry kan nie anders as om op te let dat die standbeeld van die eenoogheks op die derde vloer onbewaak en ook nie versper is nie. Dit lyk asof Fred en George reg is as hulle dink dat hulle – en nou ook Harry, Ron en Hermien – die enigste mense is wat weet dat daar 'n geheime tunnel daaragter is.

“Dink julle ons moet vir iemand daarvan sê?” vra Harry vir Ron.

“Ons weet hy kom nie by Honeydukes in nie,” sê Ron neerhalend. “Ons sou gehoor het as iemand by die winkel ingebreek het.”

Harry is bly dat Ron so voel. As die eenoogheks ook toegespyker is, sal hy glad nie na Hogsmeade kan gaan nie.

Ron het in 'n kits 'n ster geword. Vir die eerste keer in sy lewe gee mense meer aandag aan hom as aan Harry, en dit is duidelik dat Ron hierdie ondervinding terdeë geniet. Hoewel hy nog steeds baie geskok is deur die nag se gebeure, vertel hy graag, en met kleur en geur, vir almal wat vra presies wat gebeur het.

“... ek het geslaap, toe hoor ek hierdie skeurgeluid en ek dog dis in

my droom, nê, maar toe's daar hierdie wind . . . en ek word wakker en die een kant van die behangsels om my bed is afgeskeur . . . toe rol ek om . . . en ek sien hom daar oor my staan . . . soos 'n geraamte, met tonne vuil hare . . . en hy kyk na my, en ek kyk na hom en toe skree ek en toe hol hy weg.

"Maar hoekom?" vra Ron vir Harry toe die groep tweedejaarmeisies vir wie hy hierdie angswekkende verhaal vertel het, geloop het. "Hoekom het hy weggehol?"

Harry wonder ook hieroor. Hoekom het Swardt nie vir Ron stilgemaak en vir Harry gesoek toe hy besef het dat dit die verkeerde bed is nie? Swardt het twaalf jaar gelede bewys dat hy nie omgee om onskuldige mense te vermoor nie, en hierdie keer was daar net vyf ongewapende seuns van wie vier aan die slaap was.

"Hy het seker maar geweet dat hy gaan sukkel om uit die kasteel te kom na jy geskree en almal wakker geraas het," sê Harry peinsend. "Hy sou die hele huis moes doodmaak om deur die portretopening te kon kom . . . en dan's daar nog die onderwysers ook . . ."

Neville is heeltemal in onguns. Professor McGonagall was so kwaad dat sy hom enige verdere besoeke aan Hogsmeade belet het, hom detensie gegee en almal verbied het om vir hom te sê wat die toring se wagwoord is. Die arme Neville is gedwing om aand vir aand buite die geselskamer te staan en wag tot iemand hom laat inkom, dit terwyl die sekuriteitsrolle onplesierig na hom gluur. Nie een van hierdie strawwe kom egter naby die een wat sy ouma vir hom voorberei het nie. Twee dae na Swardt se inbraak stuur sy vir Neville die ergste ding wat 'n Hogwartsstudent aan die onbyttafel kan kry – 'n Skeller.

Soos altyd vlieg die skooluile die Groot Saal met die pos binne en Neville sluk swaar toe 'n yslike nonnetjiesuil met 'n bloedrooi koevert in sy snawel voor hom land. Harry en Ron wat oorkant hom sit, herken die brief dadelik as 'n Skeller – Ron het die vorige jaar een van sy ma gekry.

"Hardloop, Neville," gee Ron raad.

Dis nie nodig om dit twee keer vir Neville te sê nie. Hy gryp die koevert, hou dit soos 'n bom voor hom uit en nael uit die saal, terwyl die Slibberintafel ontplof van die lag. Hulle hoor hoe die Skeller in die ingangsportaal afgaan – en hoe Neville se ouma se stem, wat op toweragtige wyse tot 'n honderd maal die gewone volume versterk is, hom uitskel oor die skande wat hy oor sy hele familie gebring het.

Harry is so besig om Neville te bejammer dat hy nie dadelik oplet dat daar vir hom ook 'n brief is nie. Hedwig trek sy aandag deur hom geniepsig aan die pols te byt.

"Eina! O – dankie, Hedwig . . ."

Harry skeur die koevert oop terwyl Hedwig haarself aan Neville se graanvlokkies help. Die nota binne-in sê:

Liewe Harry en Ron

Wat van tee hier by my vanmiddag so teen sesuur se kant? Ek sal julle by die kasteel kom haal. WAG VIR MY IN DIE INGANGSPORTAAL, JULLE MAG NIE OP JUL EIE UITGAAN NIE.

Groete,

Hagrid

"Hy wil seker alles oor Swardt hoor!" sê Ron.

Teen sesuur daardie aand verlaat Harry en Ron die Griffindortoring, draf verby die sekuriteitstrolle en sit af na die ingangsportaal.

Hagrid wag alreeds vir hulle.

"Oukei, Hagrid!" sê Ron. "Jy wil seker alles oor Saterdag nag hoor?"

"Ek het reeds alles gehoor," sê Hagrid terwyl hy die voordeur oopmaak en hulle buitentoe lei.

"O," sê Ron en hy lyk afgehaal.

Die eerste ding wat hulle sien toe hulle Hagrid se hut binnegaan, is Bokbok. Hy lê uitgestrek op Hagrid se laslappieskwilt met sy enorme vlerke styf teen sy lyf gevou, en hy vreet aan 'n groot bord dooie frette. Toe Harry sy oë van hierdie onaangename gesig af wegdraai, sien hy 'n reuse- harige bruin pak en 'n walglike geel-en-oranje das wat aan die bokant van Hagrid se kasdeur hang.

"Waarvoor is dit, Hagrid?" sê Harry.

"Bokbok se saak teen die Komitee vir die Vernietiging van Gevaarlike Kreature," sê Hagrid. "Hierdie Vrydag. Ek en hy gaan saam Londen toe. Ek het twee beddens in die Ridderbus bespreek."

Harry voel skielik skuldig. Hy het skoon vergeet dat Bokbok se saak om die draai is, en te oordeel aan die skuldige uitdrukking op Ron se gesig, het hy ook. Hulle het ook skoon vergeet van hul belofte om met die voorbereiding van Bokbok se verdediging te help; die koms van die Vuurslag het dit heeltemal uit hul gedagtes verdryf.

Hagrid skink tee in en bied vir hulle 'n bord met suikerbolletjies aan, maar hulle bedank dit; hulle het al te veel met Hagrid se kookkuns te doen gehad.

"Ek moet iets met julle twee bespreek," sê Hagrid terwyl hy tussen hulle gaan sit en ongewoon ernstig lyk.

"Wat?" sê Harry.

"Hermien," sê Hagrid.

"Wat van haar?" sê Ron.

"Sy's in 'n verskriklike toestand, dis wat. Sy kom al van Krismis af gedurig by my kuier. Is eensaam. Eers wil julle nie met haar praat nie, oor die Vuurslag; nou wil julle nie met haar praat nie, oor haar kat –"

"– wat vir Skille geëet het!" val Ron hom ergerlik in die rede.

"Oor haar kat gemaak het soos alle katte maak," gaan Hagrid koppig

voort. "Sy't al baie gehuil, weet julle. Gaan op die oomblik deur 'n moeilike tyd. Meer afgebyt as wat sy kan kou as julle my vra, met alles wat sy probeer doen. Maar het nog steeds tyd om my met Bokbok se saak te help, oukei . . . sy't 'n klomp goeie goed vir my gekry . . . ek sou sê hy't nou nogal 'n goeie kans . . ."

"Hagrid, ons sou ook gehelp het as, wel – jammer –" begin Harry ongemaklik.

"Ek blameer julle nie!" sê Hagrid sonder om hom aan Harry se verskoning te steur. "Die vader weet, jy't genoeg om te doen, ek sien mos hoe oefen jy Kwiddiek elke uur van die dag en die nag – maar ek sê vir julle, ek't gedink julle sal meer vir julle vriendin voel as vir besemstokke en rotte. Dis al."

Harry en Ron kyk ongemaklik na mekaar.

"Sy was regtig ontsteld toe Swardt jou amper gesteeek het, Ron. Haar hart is op die regte plek, daardie Hermien s'n, en met julle twee wat nie met haar wil praat nie –"

"As sy net van daai kat ontslae wil raak, dan sal ek weer met haar praat!" sê Ron vererg, "maar sy kom nog die hele tyd op vir die ding! Hy's 'n maniak, maar sy wil niks weet nie!"

"Ag, wel, mense kan maar 'n bietjie simpel wees oor hul troeteldiere," sê Hagrid besadig. Agter hom spoeg Bokbok 'n paar bene op Hagrid se kussing uit.

Vir die res van die besoek bespreek hulle Griffindor se verbeterde kansse om die Kwiddiekbeker te verower. Teen nege-uur loop Hagrid saam met hulle terug kasteel toe.

Toe hulle weer by die geselskamer kom, staan 'n groot groep mense saamgedrom voor die kennisgewingbord.

"Hogsmeade volgende naweek!" sê Ron en rek sy nek om die nuutste kennisgewing bo-oor al die koppe te lees. "Wat's jou kanse?" vra hy sagies vir Harry toe hulle gaan sit.

"Wel, Fillis het niks aan die tunnel na Honeydukes gedoen nie . . ." sê Harry nog sagter.

"Harry!" sê 'n stem in sy regteroor. Harry ruk en kyk om na Hermien wat by die tafel reg agter hulle sit en die muur van boeke waaragter sy versteek was, eenkant toe stoot.

"Harry, as jy weer Hogsmeade toe gaan . . . dan gaan sê ek vir professor McGonagall van daardie kaart!" sê Hermien.

"Het jy iemand hoor praat, Harry?" grom Ron sonder om na Hermien te kyk.

"Ron, hoe kan jy hom toelaat om saam met jou te gaan? Na wat Sirius Swardt amper aan jou gedoen het? Ek bedoel dit, ek sal gaan sê as –"

"Nou wil jy dus hê dat Harry nog geskors moet word ook!" sê Ron woedend. "Het jy nie vanjaar al genoeg moeilikheid gemaak nie?"

Hermien maak nog haar mond oop om terug te kap, maar net toe spring Kromskeen met 'n sagte gespin op haar skoot. Hermien gee een benoude kyk na die uitdrukking op Ron se gesig, toe tel sy vir Kromskeen op en sit af na die meisies se slaapsaal toe.

“Wat sê jy?” sê Ron vir Harry asof niemand hulle onderbreek het nie. “Komaan, laas keer toe ons gegaan het, het jy niks gesien nie. Jy was nog nie eens in Zonko's nie!”

Harry kyk om en sien dat Hermien buite hoorafstand is.

“Goed,” sê hy, “maar hierdie keer neem ek die onsigbaarheidsmantel saam.”

Daardie Saterdagoggend pak Harry sy onsigbaarheidsmantel in sy tas, steek die Plunderaar se Kaart in sy sak en gaan saam met al die ander mense ondertoe vir ontbyt. Hermien kyk gedurig agterdogtig na hom, maar hy vermy haar oë en maak seker dat sy sien toe hy weer met die marmertappe wat uit die ingangsportaal lei boontoe gaan, terwyl al die ander na die voordeur stap.

“Tot siens!” roep Harry vir Ron. “Sien jou wanneer jy terugkom!” Ron grinnik en knipoog.

Harry haas hom na die derde vloer en haal die Plunderaar se Kaart langs die pad uit sy sak. Hy hurk agter die eenoogheks en druk die kaart plat. 'n Klein kolletjie beweeg in sy rigting. Harry kyk stip daarna. In die minuskule skriffie langsaa staan “Neville Loggerenberg” geskryf.

Harry haal sy towerstaf vinnig uit, mompel “*Dissendium!*” en druk sy sak by die standbeeld in, maar voor hy agterna kan klim, kom Neville om die hoek.

“Harry! Ek het skoon vergeet dat jy ook nie na Hogsmeade mag gaan nie!”

“Hallo, Neville,” sê Harry terwyl hy haastig van die standbeeld af pad-gee en die kaart in sy sak druk. “Wat doen jy alles?”

“Niks,” sê Neville en haal sy skouers op. “Is jy lus vir 'n potjie Ontplofkaart?”

“H'm – nie nou nie – ek is eintlik op pad biblioteek toe om daardie opstel oor vampiere vir Lupin te doen –”

“Ek kom saam met jou!” sê Neville opgewek. “Ek het dit ook nog nie gedoen nie!”

“H'm – wag eers – ja, ek het skoon vergeet, ek het dit gisteraand klaar gemaak.”

“Wonderlik, dan kan jy my daarmee help,” sê Neville en sy ronde gesig lyk benoud. “Ek verstaan glad nie daardie ding oor die knoffel nie – eet hulle dit, of –”

Neville bly met 'n klein snakgeluidjie stil, en kyk oor Harry se skouer. Dit is Snerp. Neville gee vinnig pad tot hy agter Harry staan.

“En wat maak julle twee hier?” vra Snerp wat gaan staan het en van die een na die ander kyk. “’n Vreemde plek vir ’n ontmoeting –”

Tot Harry se groot ontsteltenis flikker Snerp se swart oë na die poorte aan weerskante van hulle, en toe na die eenoogheks.

“Ons het nie hier – ontmoet nie,” sê Harry. “Ons het mekaar net hier – raakgeloop.”

“Inderdaad?” sê Snerp. “Jy het ’n manier om op onverwagte plekke op te daag, Potter, en jy is selde sonder ’n goeie rede daar. . . . Ek stel voor dat julle twee terugkeer na die Griffindortoring waar julle hoort.”

Harry en Neville gee sonder ’n verdere woord pad. Toe hulle om die hoek gaan, kyk Harry terug. Een van Snerp se hande beweeg ondersoekend oor die eenoogheks se kop.

Toe hulle by die Vet Vrou kom, slaag Harry daarin om Neville af te skud deur vir hom die wagwoord te sê en toe te maak asof hy sy vampieropstel in die biblioteek vergeet het en moet teruggaan om dit te gaan haal. Sodra die sekuriteitstrolle hom nie meer kan sien nie, haal hy die kaart opnuut uit en neem dit onder oë.

Dit lyk of die gang op die derde verdieping verlate is. Harry bekyk die kaart sorgvuldig en sien tot sy verligting dat die klein kolletjie wat Severus Snerp gemerk is, terug in sy kantoor is.

Hy nael terug na die eenoogheks, maak haar boggel oop, laat sak homself daardeur en gly af na waar sy tas onderaan die klipglybaan op hom wag. Hy vee die Plunderaar se Kaart weer skoon en draf aan.

Harry is heeltemal onder die onsigbaarheidsmantel versteek toe hy in die sonskyn net buite Honeydukes uitkom en vir Ron in die rug pomp.

“Dis ek,” mompel hy.

“Waar was jy?” sis Ron.

“Snerp het daar rondgehang. . . .”

Hulle loop op met Hoogstraat.

“Waar is jy?” hou Ron aan om uit die hoek van sy mond te mompel.

“Is jy nog daar? Dit voel snaaks. . . .”

Hulle gaan na die Poskantoor; Ron gee voor dat hy wil weet hoeveel dit kos om ’n uil na Bill in Egipte te stuur sodat Harry kan rondkyk. Die uile hoe-hoe saggies vir hom. Daar is ten minste driehonderd van hulle; van groot gryses tot piepklein skopsuiltjies (“slegs plaaslike aflewerings”) wat in die palm van Harry se hand sal kan pas.

Daarna gaan hulle na Zonko’s wat so vol studente is dat Harry baie versigtig moet wees om nie op iemand te trap en pandemonium te saai nie. Daar is grappe en poetse wat tot Fred en George se wildste drome sal laat waar word; Harry fluister vir Ron instruksies en gee onder sy mantel vir hom geld aan. Toe hulle by Zonko’s uitstap, is hul geldsakkies heelwat ligter as toe hulle ingegaan het, maar hul sakke staan bult van Misbom-

me, Hiklekkers, Paddaerseepp asook 'n Neusbyt-teekoppie vir elkeen van hulle.

Dis 'n lekker dag en net 'n ligte windjie waai. Nie een van die twee is lus om binne te bly nie, dus loop hulle verby die Drie Besemstokke en op teen die bult na die Kermende Krot toe, die gebou met die meeste spoke in Brittanje. Dit troon 'n klein entjie bo die res van die dorp uit en met sy toegespykerde vensters en klam en oorgroeide tuin, lyk dit selfs helder oordag ietwat makaber.

"Selfs die Hogwarts-spoke bly hier weg," sê Ron toe hulle oor die heining leun om daarna te kyk. "Ek het vir Nick-amper-sonder-kop gevra . . . hy sê hy het gehoor dat 'n baie wilde klomp mense hier gewoon het. Maar niemand kan inkom nie. Fred en George het natuurlik al probeer, maar al die ingange is verseël —"

Harry is warm na die ent se klim en net van plan om die mantel vir 'n rukkie af te haal, toe hulle stemme daar naby hoor. Iemand is besig om die heuwel van die ander kant af uit te klim en oomblikke later verskyn Malfoy, met Krabbe en Goliat kort op sy hakke. Malfoy is aan die woord.

" . . . behoort enige oomblik 'n uil van Vader af te kry. Hy moes na die verhoor gaan om vir hulle van my arm te vertel . . . oor hoe ek dit drie maande lank nie kon gebruik nie . . . "

Krabbe en Goliat giggellag.

"Ek wens regtig ek kon hoor hoe daardie groot harige moroon homself probeer verdedig het . . . 'Daar's g'n niks kwaad in hom nie, ek sweer'. daardie Hippogrief is so goed as dood —"

Dan sien Malfoy skielik vir Ron. Sy bleek gesig split oop in 'n venynige glimlag.

"Wat maak jy hier, Weasley?"

Malfoy kyk na die vervalle huis agter Ron.

"Ek skat jy sal dit vreeslik geniet om hier te kan woon, of hoe, Weasley? Droom seker oor jou eie kamer? Ek hoor jou mense slaap almal in dieselfde vertrek — is dit waar?"

Harry gryp die agterkant van Ron se kleed vas om te keer dat hy vir Malfoy bevlieg.

"Los hom vir my," sis hy in Ron se oor.

Dis so 'n goeie kans dat hy dit net moet gebruik. Harry kruip suutjies tot hy agter Malfoy, Krabbe en Goliat is, toe buk hy en skep 'n hand vol modder uit die pad uit op.

"Ons praai nou net oor jou vriend Hagrid," sê Malfoy vir Ron. "Probeer jou net indink wat hy alles vir die Komitee vir die Vernietiging van Gevaarlike Creature sê. Dink jy hy gaan huil as hulle sy Hippogrief se kop —"

SLOTSJ!

Toe die modder hom tref, ruk Malfoy se kop vooroor; sy silwerblonde hare is skielik besmeer met modder.

“Wat de –?”

Ron moet aan die heining vashou om regop te bly so hard lag hy. Malfoy, Krabbe en Goliat draai verdwaas om en kyk wildweg om hulle rond, terwyl Malfoy probeer om sy hare skoon te vee.

“Wat was dit? Wie’t dit gedoen?”

“Spook vreeslik hier bo, of hoe?” sê Ron soos een wat bloot oor die weer gesels.

Krabbe en Goliat lyk verskrik. Hul bultende spiere is nutteloos teen spoke. Malfoy gluur verwoed om hom en na die verlate landskap.

Harry glip teen die paadjie af na ’n besonder slobberige plas vol stink groen slyk.

SPLOF!

Hierdie keer tref dit vir Krabbe en Goliat. Goliat hop ergerlik op en af en probeer om die modder uit sy klein dowwe ogies te vryf.

“Dit kom van daar oorkant af!” sê Malfoy terwyl hy sy gesig afvee en na ’n kol so twee meter links van Harry staar.

Krabbe strompel soontoe met sy lang arms uitgestrek voor hom soos ’n zombie. Harry koes weg, tel ’n stok op en gooi dit teen Krabbe se rug. Harry vou amper dubbeld van die lag toe Krabbe ’n paar danspassies in die lug maak soos hy probeer sien wie dit gedoen het. Ron is die enigste mens vir wie Krabbe kan sien, dus pyl hy op Ron af, maar Harry steek sy been uit om hom te pootjie. Krabbe struikel – en sy groot plat poot vang die soom van Harry se onsigbaarheidsmantel. Harry voel hoe dit glip, en toe gly die mantel van sy kop af.

Vir ’n breukdeel van ’n sekonde kyk Malfoy oorbluf na hom.

“AAARG!” gil hy dan en wys na Harry se kop. Toe vlieg hy om en nael in dolle vaart teen die heuwel af met Krabbe en Goliat oop en toe agterna.

Harry trek die mantel weer vinnig oor hom, maar dis te laat, die kwaad is gedoen.

“Harry!” sê Ron terwyl hy nader strompel en dan hulpeloos na die plek staar waar Harry so pas nog was, “jy moet maak dat jy wegkom! As Malfoy iets vir iemand moet sê – jy moet nou dadelik by die kasteel kom –”

“Sien jou later,” sê Harry en sonder ’n verdere woord laat spaander hy Hogsmeade toe.

Glo Malfoy dit wat hy gesien het? Sal enigiemand vir Malfoy glo? Niemand weet van die onsigbaarheidsmantel nie – niemand behalwe Dompeldorius nie. Harry se maag draai – as Malfoy praat, sal Dompeldorius presies weet wat aangaan.

Terug in Honeydukes, af met die kelder se trappe, oor die klipvloer, deur die valdeur – Harry haal die mantel af, druk dit onder sy arm in en hardloop in volle vaart met die tunnel langs . . . Malfoy gaan eerste daar wees . . . Hoe lank gaan dit vat voor hy ’n onderwyser in die hande gekry

het? Harry hyg na asem en daar is 'n skerp pyn in sy ribbes, maar hy verslap nie sy pas nie, nie voor hy die klipglybaan bereik het nie. Hy sal die mantel hier moet los, dit sal hom onmiddellik weggee as Malfoy dalk al vir 'n onderwyser iets gesê het. Hy steek dit in 'n donker hoekie weg en klim dan so vinnig as wat hy kan boontoe. Sy hande is so sweterig dat hy omtrent nie 'n greep op die kante van die klipglybaan het nie. Toe hy in die heks se boggel kom, tik hy met sy towerstaf daarteen, steek sy kop deur en lig homself uit; die boggel gaan toe en net toe Harry agter die standbeeld uitspring, hoor hy haastige voetstappe wat al nader kom.

Dit is Snerp. Hy stap teen 'n vinnige pas op Harry af sodat sy swart kleed om hom warrel, en steek dan voor Harry vas.

"So," sê hy.

Daar is 'n trek van onderdrukte triomf oor hom. Harry probeer onskuldig lyk, maar hy is baie bewus van sy sweterige gesig en sy modderige hande wat hy diep in sy sakke druk.

"Kom saam met my, Potter," sê Snerp.

Harry stap agter hom aan, terwyl hy probeer om sy hande ongemerk aan die binnekant van sy kleed af te vee. Hulle stap af met die trappe na die kerkers en van daar na Snerp se kantoor.

Harry was nog net een keer tevore hier, en toe was hy ook diep in die sop. Snerp het intussen nog 'n paar grieselige slymerige goed in flesses bygekry wat op rakke agter sy lessenaar staan en in die lig van die vuur flikker sodat alles nog meer onheilspellend lyk.

"Sit," sê Snerp.

Harry gaan sit. Snerp bly egter staan.

"Mnr. Malfoy was nou net hier met 'n eenaardige verhaal, Potter," sê Snerp.

Harry antwoord nie.

"Hy sê hy was bo by die Kermende Krot waar hy vir Weasley raakge-loop het – oënskynlik alleen."

Harry antwoord nog steeds nie.

"Mnr. Malfoy beweer dat hy met Weasley staan en gesels het toe 'n groot spul modder hom teen die agterkant van die kop getref het. Hoe dink jy het dit gebeur?"

Harry probeer om effens verbaas te lyk.

"Ek weet nie, professor."

Snerp se oë boor in Harry se n. Dit voel vir Harry asof hy na 'n Hippogrief staar. Hy probeer hard om nie sy oë te knip nie.

"Mnr. Malfoy het toe 'n rare verskynsel waargeneem. Kan jy dink wat dit was, Potter?"

"Nee," sê Harry wat nou probeer om onskuldig, maar ook nuuskierig, te klink.

"Dit was jou kop, Potter. Dit het in die lug gehang."

Daar is 'n lang stilte.

"Miskien moet hy na Madame Pomfrey toe gaan," sê Harry. "As hy eers sulke goed begin sien –"

"Wat het jou kop in Hogsmeade gemaak, Potter?" sê Snerp sag. "Jou kop word nie in Hogsmeade toegelaat nie. Geen deel van jou liggaam het verlof om in Hogsmeade te wees nie."

"Ek weet dit," sê Harry wat probeer om sy gesig op so 'n plooi te trek dat dit moet lyk asof hy glad nie skuldig of bang voel nie. "Dit klink of Malfoy hallusi-"

"Malfoy hallusineer nie," snou Snerp hom toe en hy druk met sy hande op Harry se stoel se armleunings en leun vooroor tot hul gesigte feitlik teen mekaar is. "As jou kop in Hogsmeade was, was die res van jou ook daar."

"Ek was in die Griffindortoring," sê Harry. "Ek het mos so gesê –"

"Kan iemand dit bevestig?"

Harry sê niks. Snerp se dun mond krul in 'n aaklige glimlag.

"So," sê hy toe hy regop kom. "Almal, van die Minister vir Towerkuns af, doen hul bes om die beroemde Harry Potter teen Sirius Swardt te beskerm. Die beroemde Harry Potter is egter 'n wet op sigself. Laat die gewone mense hulle maar oor sy veiligheid bekommer! Die beroemde Harry Potter gaan waar hy wil, met geen gedagte aan die gevolge nie."

Harry bly nog steeds stil. Snerp probeer hom kwaad maak in die hoop dat hy die waarheid sal uitblaker. Hy gaan dit nie doen nie. Snerp het geen bewyse nie – nog nie.

"Hoe buitengewoon baie is jy nie soos jou pa nie, Potter," sê Snerp onverwags en sy oë glinster. "Hy was ook uitsonderlik arrogant. 'n Klein bietjie talent op die Kwiddiekveld het gesorg dat hy homself as verhewe bo die res van ons beskou het. Het die wêreld vol saam met sy vriende en bewonderaars loop en pronk . . . die ooreenkoms tussen julle is verstommend."

"My pa het nie gepronk nie," sê Harry voor hy homself kan keer, "en ek ook nie."

"Jou pa het hom ook nie besonder baie aan die reëls gesteur nie," hits Snerp hom aan en sy skraal gesig is vol venyn. "Reëls is vir gewone sterflinge, nie vir Kwiddiekbekerwenners nie. Hy het so 'n geswolle hoof gehad dat –"

"HOU JOU MOND!"

Harry spring orent. Woede, soos hy nog nie weer sedert die laaste nag by Ligusterlaan ervaar het nie, bruis deur sy are. Dit skeel hom min dat Snerp se gesig heeltemal stil geword het en dat sy swart oë gevaarlik flikker.

"Wat het jy vir my gesê, Potter?"

"Ek het gesê jy moet jou mond van my pa af hou!" gil Harry. "Ek weet wat die waarheid is, oukei! Hy het jou lewe gered! Dompeldorius het my

vertel! Jy sou nie eens hier gewees het as dit nie vir my pa was nie!”

Snerp se bleek vel word die kleur van suur melk.

“En het die skoolhoof jou vertel wat die omstandighede was waarin jou vader my lewe gered het?” fluister hy. “Of het hy gedink dat hierdie besonderhede te onaangenaam vir die skattige Potter se delikate klein oortjies is?”

Harry byt op sy lip. Hy weet nie wat gebeur het nie en hy wil dit nie erken nie – maar dit lyk of Snerp geraai het wat die waarheid is.

“Ek sal dit haat as jy hier moet wegstap met ’n vals idee oor jou vader, Potter,” sê hy en ’n vreeslike skewe grynslag vertrek sy gesig. “Dink jy nog die hele tyd dat dit die een of ander grootse heldedaad was? Laat ek dinge vir jou regstel – jou hoogheilige vader en sy vriende het ’n baie komiese poets op my probeer bak, ’n poets wat tot my dood sou gelei het as jou vader nie op die laaste oomblik koue voete gekry het nie. Hy wou sy eie bas net so graag soos myne red. Indien hul grappie geslaag het, sou hy uit Hogwarts geskors gewees het.”

Snerp se onegalige geel tande is ontbloot.

“Dop jou sakke om, Potter!” spoeg hy dit skielik uit.

Harry roer nie. Daar is ’n gehamer in sy ore.

“Dop jou sakke om of ons gaan reguit na die skoolhoof toe! Dop hulle om, Potter!”

Koud van vrees haal Harry die sakkie met Zonko se poetse en die Plunderaar se Kaart uit.

Snerp tel die Zonko-sakkie op.

“Ron het dit vir my gegee,” sê Harry terwyl hy bid vir ’n kans om Ron te waarsku voor Snerp hom sien. “Hy – het dit laas keer van Hogsmeade af gebring –”

“Inderdaad? En jy dra dit nog die hele tyd met jou saam? Hoe aan-doenlik . . . en wat is dit?”

Snerp tel die kaart op. Harry doen sy bes om nie ’n spier op sy gesig te roer nie.

“’n Stukkie perkament,” sê hy en haal sy skouers op.

Met sy oë op Harry draai Snerp dit om.

“Jy het darem seker nie so ’n ou stukkie perkament nodig nie?” sê hy. “Hoekom – hoekom gooi ek dit nie sommer net weg nie?”

Sy hand beweeg na die vuur.

“Nee!” sê Harry vinnig.

“So!” sê Snerp en sy dun neusvleuels bewe. “Is dit nog ’n kosbare geskenk van mnr. Weasley? Of is dit – iets anders? ’n Brief dalk, geskryf in onsigbare ink? Of – instruksies oor hoe om in Hogsmeade te kom sonder om verby die Dementors te gaan?”

Harry knipper sy oë. Snerp se oë glinster.

“Laat ek sien, laat ek sien . . .” mompel hy terwyl hy sy towerstaf uit-

haal en die kaart op sy lessenaar platstryk. "Onthul jou geheim!" sê hy en raak die kaart met sy towerstaf aan.

Niks gebeur nie. Harry bal sy hande in vuiste om te keer dat hulle bewe.

"Openbaar jouself!" sê Snerp en tik hard op die kaart.

Dit bly leeg. Harry haal diep asem in 'n poging om homself te kalm.

"Professor Severus Snerp, onderwyser aan hierdie skool, beveel jou om die inligting wat jy verberg, te openbaar!" sê Snerp en slaan met sy towerstaf teen die kaart.

Woorde verskyn op die gladde oppervlak van die kaart nes of 'n onsigbare hand daarop skryf.

"Mnr. Maantjie stuur sy komplimente aan professor Snerp, en versoek dat hy sy abnormaal lang neus uit ander mense se sake moet hou."

Snerp staan botstil. Harry kyk dronkgeslaan na die boodskap. Die kaart hou egter nie hier op nie. Verdere woorde verskyn onder die voriges.

"Mnr. Gaffel stem met mnr. Maantjie saam en wil byvoeg dat professor Snerp 'n aaklige ou bok is."

Dit sou snaaks gewees het as die situasie nie so benard was nie. Dis ook nie al nie . . .

"Mnr. Kussingvoet spreek hiermee sy verbasing uit dat so 'n idioot ooit 'n professor kon word."

Harry se oë val toe van skok. Toe hulle weer oopgaan, skryf die kaart sy laaste woorde neer.

"Mnr. Wurmstert wens vir professor Snerp 'n goeie dag toe, en beveel aan dat die ou slymbol sy hare was."

Harry wag vir die doodskoot.

"So . . ." sê Snerp saggies. "Ons sal sien . . ."

Hy stap na die vuur, gryp 'n hand vol glinsterende poeier uit 'n fles wat bo die kaggel staan en gooi dit in die vlamme.

"Lupin!" roep Snerp in die vuur. "Ek moet met jou praat!"

Totaal verwilderd staar Harry na die vuur. 'n Groot vorm wat vinnig in die rondte draai, verskyn daarin. Oomblikke later klouter professor Lupin uit die kaggel terwyl hy as van sy verslete kleed afborsel.

"Het jy geroep, Severus?" vra Lupin bedaad.

"Ek het beslis," sê Snerp en sy gesig is vertrek van woede toe hy na sy lessenaar stap. "Ek het so pas vir Potter gevra om sy sakke leeg te maak. Dit was daarin."

Snerp wys na die perkament waarop die woorde Mnr. Maantjie, Wurmstert, Kussingvoet en Gaffel nog glinster. 'n Vreemde geslote uitdrukking verskyn op Lupin se gesig.

"Wel?" sê Snerp.

Lupin staar nog steeds na die kaart. Harry kry die indruk dat Lupin baie vinnig dink.

“Wel?” sê Snerp weer. “Hierdie perkament is duidelik vol Donker Towerkuns. Jy is veronderstel om ’n kundige te wees, Lupin. Hoe dink jy het Potter dit in die hande gekry?”

Lupin kyk op, en sy oë wat vlugtig in Harry se rigting flikker, waarsku Harry om hom nie te onderbreek nie.

“Vol Donker Towerkuns?” herhaal hy bedoord: “Dink jy werklik so, Severus? Dit lyk vir my bloot na ’n stukkie perkament wat diegene beleedig wat dit probeer lees. Kinderagtig, maar darem seker nie gevaarlik nie? Ek sou sê dat Harry dit by ’n grapwinkel gekry het –”

“Inderdaad?” sê Snerp. Sy kakebeen is stokstyf van woede. “Jy dink dus dat ’n grapwinkel so iets aan hom voorsien het? Jy dink nie dat dit baie meer waarskynlik is dat hy dit *direk van die vervaardigers af gekry het nie?*”

Harry weet nie waarvan Snerp praat nie. Lupin skynbaar ook nie.

“Jy bedoel mnr. Wurmstert of een van daardie mense?” sê hy. “Harry, ken jy enige van hierdie persone?”

“Nee,” sê Harry gou.

“Sien jy, Severus?” sê Lupin toe hy terugdraai na Snerp. “Dit lyk vir my baie soos iets uit Zonko’s –”

Net toe, en asof op ’n bevel kom Ron die kantoor binnegestorm. Hy is heeltemal uitasem en toe hy kort voor Snerp se lessenaar tot stilstand kom, gryp hy na die miltsteek in sy bors voor hy begin praat.

“Ek – het – daardie – goed – vir – Harry – gegee,” wurg hy dit uit. “Het – dit – lank – gelede – in – Zonko’s – gekoop . . .”

“Sien!” sê Lupin en klap sy hande teen mekaar terwyl hy opgetoe om hom kyk. “Dit verduidelik alles! Severus, ek sal dit neem, dankie.” Hy vou die kaart op en steek dit in sy kleed. “Harry, Ron, kom saam met my, ek moet met julle oor die vampieropstel praat. Verskoon ons, Severus.”

Harry waag dit nie om na professor Snerp te kyk toe hulle uit sy kantoor stap nie. Hy, Ron en Lupin loop die hele ent pad tot in die ingangsportaal voor hulle iets sê. Toe draai Harry na Lupin.

“Professor, ek –”

“Ek wil nie na verduidelikings luister nie,” sê Lupin kortaf. Hy kyk om hom in die leë ingangsportaal en laat sak dan sy stem. “Ek weet toevallik dat hierdie kaart baie jare gelede deur mnr. Jellis gekonfiskeer is. Ja, ek weet dit is ’n kaart,” sê hy toe Harry en Ron verbaas lyk. “Ek wil egter nie weet hoe julle daaraan gekom het nie. Ek is wel *verstom* dat julle dit nie ingehandig het nie. Veral nie na wat gebeur het die vorige keer toe ’n student inligting in die kasteel laat rondlê het nie. Jy kan dit ook nie terugkry nie, Harry.”

Harry het dit verwag, maar hy wil te graag weet wat gebeur het om beswaar te maak. “Hoekom het Professor Snerp gedink dat ek dit by die vervaardigers gekry het?”

“Omdat . . .” Lupin aarsel, “omdat die vervaardigers van hierdie kaart jou graag uit die skool sou wou lok. Vir hulle sal dit erg vermaaklik gewees het.”

“Ken u hulle dan?” vra Harry beïndruk.

“Ons het ontmoet,” kom die antwoord saaklik. Hy kyk na Harry met meer erns as tevore. “Moenie verwag dat ek weer vir jou gaan opkom nie, Harry. Ek kan jou nie dwing om Sirius Swardt ernstig op te neem nie. Ek het egter verwag dat dit wat jy moet aanhoor elke keer dat die Dementors naby jou kom, ’n groter uitwerking op jou sou hê. Jou ouers het hulle lewe opgeoffer sodat jy kan lewe, Harry. Om vir ’n sakkie vol towerpoetse met hulle opoffering te dobbel, is nie die manier om hulle te beloon nie.”

Toe hy wegstap, voel Harry erger as wat hy in enige stadium in Snerp se kantoor gevoel het. Hy en Ron stap stadig met die marmertrappe op boontoe. Toe Harry verby die eenoogheks gaan, onthou hy die onsigbaarheidsmantel, maar hy kan dit nie waag om dit te gaan haal nie.

“Dis my skuld,” sê Ron meteens. “Ek het jou omgepraat om te gaan. Lupin is reg, dit was simpel, ons moes dit nie gedoen het nie –”

Hy bly stil, hulle is in die gang wat deur die trolle gepatrolleer word en Hermien kom na hulle toe aangestap. Een kyk na haar gesig is genoeg vir Harry om te weet dat sy gehoor het wat gebeur het. Sy hart val – sê nou sy het vir professor McGonagall gesê?

“Gekom om lekker te kry?” sê Ron venynig toe sy voor hulle gaan staan. “Of het jy ons so pas gaan verklik?”

“Nee,” sê Hermien. Sy hou ’n brief in albei hande vas en haar lip bewe. “Ek het gedink dat julle moet weet . . . Hagrid het die saak verloor. Bok-bok gaan tereggestel word.”

CHAPTER FIFTEEN



THE QUIDDITCH FINAL

He — he sent me this,” Hermione said, holding out the letter. Harry took it. The parchment was damp, and enormous teardrops had smudged the ink so badly in places that it was very difficult to read.

Dear Hermione,

We lost. I'm allowed to bring him back to Hogwarts.

Execution date to be fixed.

Beaky has enjoyed London.

I won't forget all the help you gave us.

Hagrid

“They can’t do this,” said Harry. “They can’t. Buckbeak isn’t

dangerous.”

“Malfoy’s dad’s frightened the Committee into it,” said Hermione, wiping her eyes. “You know what he’s like. They’re a bunch of doddering old fools, and they were scared. There’ll be an appeal, though, there always is. Only I can’t see any hope. . . . Nothing will have changed.”

“Yeah, it will,” said Ron fiercely. “You won’t have to do all the work alone this time, Hermione. I’ll help.”

“Oh, Ron!”

Hermione flung her arms around Ron’s neck and broke down completely. Ron, looking quite terrified, patted her very awkwardly on the top of the head. Finally, Hermione drew away.

“Ron, I’m really, really sorry about Scabbers,” she sobbed.

“Oh — well — he was old,” said Ron, looking thoroughly relieved that she had let go of him. “And he was a bit useless. You never know, Mum and Dad might get me an owl now.”

The safety measures imposed on the students since Black’s second break-in made it impossible for Harry, Ron, and Hermione to go and visit Hagrid in the evenings. Their only chance of talking to him was during Care of Magical Creatures lessons.

He seemed numb with shock at the verdict.

“S’all my fault. Got all tongue-tied. They was all sittin’ there in black robes an’ I kep’ droppin’ me notes and forgettin’ all them dates yeh looked up fer me, Hermione. An’ then Lucius Malfoy stood up an’ said his bit, and the Committee jus’ did exac’ly what he told ’em”

“There’s still the appeal!” said Ron fiercely. “Don’t give up yet, we’re working on it!”

They were walking back up to the castle with the rest of the class. Ahead they could see Malfoy, who was walking with Crabbe and Goyle, and kept looking back, laughing derisively.

“S’no good, Ron,” said Hagrid sadly as they reached the castle steps. “That Committee’s in Lucius Malfoy’s pocket. I’m jus’ gonna make sure the rest o’ Beaky’s time is the happiest he’s ever had. I owe him that. . . .”

Hagrid turned around and hurried back toward his cabin, his face buried in his handkerchief.

“Look at him blubber!”

Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle had been standing just inside the castle doors, listening.

“Have you ever seen anything quite as pathetic?” said Malfoy. “And he’s supposed to be our teacher!”

Harry and Ron both made furious moves toward Malfoy, but Hermione got there first — SMACK!

She had slapped Malfoy across the face with all the strength she could muster. Malfoy staggered. Harry, Ron, Crabbe, and Goyle stood flabbergasted as Hermione raised her hand again.

“Don’t you *dare* call Hagrid pathetic, you foul — you evil —”

“Hermione!” said Ron weakly, and he tried to grab her hand as she swung it back.

“Get *off*, Ron!”

Hermione pulled out her wand. Malfoy stepped backward. Crabbe and Goyle looked at him for instructions, thoroughly bewildered.

“C’m on,” Malfoy muttered, and in a moment, all three of them had disappeared into the passageway to the dungeons.

“*Hermione!*” Ron said again, sounding both stunned and impressed.

“Harry, you’d better beat him in the Quidditch final!” Hermione said shrilly. “You just better had, because I can’t stand it if Slytherin wins!”

“We’re due in Charms,” said Ron, still goggling at Hermione. “We’d better go.”

They hurried up the marble staircase toward Professor Flitwick’s classroom.

“You’re late, boys!” said Professor Flitwick reprovingly as Harry opened the classroom door. “Come along, quickly, wands out, we’re experimenting with Cheering Charms today, we’ve already divided into pairs —”

Harry and Ron hurried to a desk at the back and opened their bags. Ron looked behind him.

“Where’s Hermione gone?”

Harry looked around too. Hermione hadn’t entered the classroom, yet Harry knew she had been right next to him when he had opened the door.

“That’s weird,” said Harry, staring at Ron. “Maybe — maybe she went to the bathroom or something?”

But Hermione didn’t turn up all lesson.

“She could’ve done with a Cheering Charm on her too,” said Ron as the class left for lunch, all grinning broadly — the Cheering Charms had left them with a feeling of great contentment.

Hermione wasn't at lunch either. By the time they had finished their apple pie, the after-effects of the Cheering Charms were wearing off, and Harry and Ron had started to get slightly worried.

"You don't think Malfoy did something to her?" Ron said anxiously as they hurried upstairs toward Gryffindor Tower.

They passed the security trolls, gave the Fat Lady the password ("Flibbertigibbet"), and scrambled through the portrait hole into the common room.

Hermione was sitting at a table, fast asleep, her head resting on an open Arithmancy book. They went to sit down on either side of her. Harry prodded her awake.

"W-what?" said Hermione, waking with a start and staring wildly around. "Is it time to go? W-which lesson have we got now?"

"Divination, but it's not for another twenty minutes," said Harry. "Hermione, why didn't you come to Charms?"

"What? Oh no!" Hermione squeaked. "I forgot to go to Charms!"

"But how could you forget?" said Harry. "You were with us till we were right outside the classroom!"

"I don't believe it!" Hermione wailed. "Was Professor Flitwick angry? Oh, it was Malfoy, I was thinking about him and I lost track of things!"

"You know what, Hermione?" said Ron, looking down at the enormous Arithmancy book Hermione had been using as a pillow. "I reckon you're cracking up. You're trying to do too much."

"No, I'm not!" said Hermione, brushing her hair out of her eyes and staring hopelessly around for her bag. "I just made a mistake, that's all! I'd better go and see Professor Flitwick and say sorry."

I'll see you in Divination!"

Hermione joined them at the foot of the ladder to Professor Trelawney's classroom twenty minutes later, looking extremely harrassed.

"I can't believe I missed Cheering Charms! And I bet they come up in our exams; Professor Flitwick hinted they might!"

Together they climbed the ladder into the dim, stifling tower room. Glowing on every little table was a crystal ball full of pearly white mist. Harry, Ron, and Hermione sat down together at the same rickety table.

"I thought we weren't starting crystal balls until next term," Ron muttered, casting a wary eye around for Professor Trelawney, in case she was lurking nearby.

"Don't complain, this means we've finished palmistry," Harry muttered back. "I was getting sick of her flinching every time she looked at my hands."

"Good day to you!" said the familiar, misty voice, and Professor Trelawney made her usual dramatic entrance out of the shadows. Parvati and Lavender quivered with excitement, their faces lit by the milky glow of their crystal ball.

"I have decided to introduce the crystal ball a little earlier than I had planned," said Professor Trelawney, sitting with her back to the fire and gazing around. "The fates have informed me that your examination in June will concern the Orb, and I am anxious to give you sufficient practice."

Hermione snorted.

"Well, honestly . . . 'the fates have informed her' . . . who sets the

exam? She does! What an amazing prediction!” she said, not troubling to keep her voice low. Harry and Ron choked back laughs.

It was hard to tell whether Professor Trelawney had heard them, as her face was hidden in shadow. She continued, however, as though she had not.

“Crystal gazing is a particularly refined art,” she said dreamily. “I do not expect any of you to See when first you peer into the Orb’s infinite depths. We shall start by practicing relaxing the conscious mind and external eyes” — Ron began to snigger uncontrollably and had to stuff his fist in his mouth to stifle the noise — “so as to clear the Inner Eye and the superconscious. Perhaps, if we are lucky, some of you will See before the end of the class.”

And so they began. Harry, at least, felt extremely foolish, staring blankly at the crystal ball, trying to keep his mind empty when thoughts such as “This is stupid” kept drifting across it. It didn’t help that Ron kept breaking into silent giggles and Hermione kept tutting.

“Seen anything yet?” Harry asked them after a quarter of an hour’s quiet crystal gazing.

“Yeah, there’s a burn on this table,” said Ron, pointing. “Someone’s spilled their candle.”

“This is such a waste of time,” Hermione hissed. “I could be practicing something useful. I could be catching up on Cheering Charms —”

Professor Trelawney rustled past.

“Would anyone like me to help them interpret the shadowy portents within their Orb?” she murmured over the clinking of her bangles.

“I don’t need help,” Ron whispered. “It’s obvious what this means.

There's going to be loads of fog tonight."

Both Harry and Hermione burst out laughing.

"Now, really!" said Professor Trelawney as everyone's heads turned in their direction. Parvati and Lavender were looking scandalized. "You are disturbing the clairvoyant vibrations!" She approached their table and peered into their crystal ball. Harry felt his heart sinking. He was sure he knew what was coming —

"There is something here!" Professor Trelawney whispered, lowering her face to the ball, so that it was reflected twice in her huge glasses. "Something moving . . . but what is it?"

Harry was prepared to bet everything he owned, including his Firebolt, that it wasn't good news, whatever it was. And sure enough —

"My dear . . .," Professor Trelawney breathed, gazing up at Harry. "It is here, plainer than ever before . . . my dear, stalking toward you, growing ever closer . . . the Gr —"

"Oh, for *goodness*' sake!" said Hermione loudly. "Not that ridiculous Grim *again*!"

Professor Trelawney raised her enormous eyes to Hermione's face. Parvati whispered something to Lavender, and they both glared at Hermione too. Professor Trelawney stood up, surveying Hermione with unmistakable anger.

"I am sorry to say that from the moment you have arrived in this class, my *dear*, it has been apparent that you do not have what the noble art of Divination requires. Indeed, I don't remember ever meeting a student whose mind was so hopelessly mundane."

There was a moment's silence. Then —

“Fine!” said Hermione suddenly, getting up and cramming *Unfogging the Future* back into her bag. “Fine!” she repeated, swinging the bag over her shoulder and almost knocking Ron off his chair. “I give up! I’m leaving!”

And to the whole class’s amazement, Hermione strode over to the trapdoor, kicked it open, and climbed down the ladder out of sight.

It took a few minutes for the class to settle down again. Professor Trelawney seemed to have forgotten all about the Grim. She turned abruptly from Harry and Ron’s table, breathing rather heavily as she tugged her gauzy shawl more closely to her.

“Ooooo!” said Lavender suddenly, making everyone start. “Oooooo, Professor Trelawney, I’ve just remembered! You saw her leaving, didn’t you? Didn’t you, Professor? ‘*Around Easter, one of our number will leave us forever!*’ You said it *ages* ago, Professor!”

Professor Trelawney gave her a dewy smile.

“Yes, my dear, I did indeed know that Miss Granger would be leaving us. One hopes, however, that one might have mistaken the Signs. . . . The Inner Eye can be a burden, you know. . . .”

Lavender and Parvati looked deeply impressed, and moved over so that Professor Trelawney could join their table instead.

“Some day Hermione’s having, eh?” Ron muttered to Harry, looking awed.

“Yeah. . . .”

Harry glanced into the crystal ball but saw nothing but swirling white mist. Had Professor Trelawney really seen the Grim again? Would he? The last thing he needed was another near-fatal accident, with the Quidditch final drawing ever nearer.

The Easter holidays were not exactly relaxing. The third years had never had so much homework. Neville Longbottom seemed close to a nervous collapse, and he wasn't the only one.

"Call this a holiday!" Seamus Finnigan roared at the common room one afternoon. "The exams are ages away, what're they playing at?"

But nobody had as much to do as Hermione. Even without Divination, she was taking more subjects than anybody else. She was usually last to leave the common room at night, first to arrive at the library the next morning; she had shadows like Lupin's under her eyes, and seemed constantly close to tears.

Ron had taken over responsibility for Buckbeak's appeal. When he wasn't doing his own work, he was poring over enormously thick volumes with names like *The Handbook of Hippogriff Psychology* and *Fowl or Foul? A Study of Hippogriff Brutality*. He was so absorbed, he even forgot to be horrible to Crookshanks.

Harry, meanwhile, had to fit in his homework around Quidditch practice every day, not to mention endless discussions of tactics with Wood. The Gryffindor-Slytherin match would take place on the first Saturday after the Easter holidays. Slytherin was leading the tournament by exactly two hundred points. This meant (as Wood constantly reminded his team) that they needed to win the match by more than that amount to win the Cup. It also meant that the burden of winning fell largely on Harry, because capturing the Snitch was worth one hundred and fifty points.

"So you must catch it *only* if we're *more than* fifty points up," Wood told Harry constantly. "Only if we're more than fifty points up, Harry, or we win the match but lose the Cup. You've got that, haven't

you? You must catch the Snitch only if we're —"

"I KNOW, OLIVER!" Harry yelled.

The whole of Gryffindor House was obsessed with the coming match. Gryffindor hadn't won the Quidditch Cup since the legendary Charlie Weasley (Ron's second oldest brother) had been Seeker. But Harry doubted whether any of them, even Wood, wanted to win as much as he did. The enmity between Harry and Malfoy was at its highest point ever. Malfoy was still smarting about the mud-throwing incident in Hogsmeade and was even more furious that Harry had somehow wormed his way out of punishment. Harry hadn't forgotten Malfoy's attempt to sabotage him in the match against Ravenclaw, but it was the matter of Buckbeak that made him most determined to beat Malfoy in front of the entire school.

Never, in anyone's memory, had a match approached in such a highly charged atmosphere. By the time the holidays were over, tension between the two teams and their Houses was at the breaking point. A number of small scuffles broke out in the corridors, culminating in a nasty incident in which a Gryffindor fourth year and a Slytherin sixth year ended up in the hospital wing with leeks sprouting out of their ears.

Harry was having a particularly bad time of it. He couldn't walk to class without Slytherins sticking out their legs and trying to trip him up; Crabbe and Goyle kept popping up wherever he went, and slouching away looking disappointed when they saw him surrounded by people. Wood had given instructions that Harry should be accompanied everywhere, in case the Slytherins tried to put him out of action. The whole of Gryffindor House took up the challenge

enthusiastically, so that it was impossible for Harry to get to classes on time because he was surrounded by a vast, chattering crowd. Harry was more concerned for his Firebolt's safety than his own. When he wasn't flying it, he locked it securely in his trunk and frequently dashed back up to Gryffindor Tower at break times to check that it was still there.

All usual pursuits were abandoned in the Gryffindor common room the night before the match. Even Hermione had put down her books.

"I can't work, I can't concentrate," she said nervously.

There was a great deal of noise. Fred and George Weasley were dealing with the pressure by being louder and more exuberant than ever. Oliver Wood was crouched over a model of a Quidditch field in the corner, prodding little figures across it with his wand and muttering to himself. Angelina, Alicia, and Katie were laughing at Fred's and George's jokes. Harry was sitting with Ron and Hermione, removed from the center of things, trying not to think about the next day, because every time he did, he had the horrible sensation that something very large was fighting to get out of his stomach.

"You're going to be fine," Hermione told him, though she looked positively terrified.

"You've got a *Firebolt*!" said Ron.

"Yeah . . .," said Harry, his stomach writhing.

It came as a relief when Wood suddenly stood up and yelled, "Team! Bed!"

Harry slept badly. First he dreamed that he had overslept, and that Wood was yelling, "Where were you? We had to use Neville

instead!" Then he dreamed that Malfoy and the rest of the Slytherin team arrived for the match riding dragons. He was flying at breakneck speed, trying to avoid a spurt of flames from Malfoy's steed's mouth, when he realized he had forgotten his Firebolt. He fell through the air and woke with a start.

It was a few seconds before Harry remembered that the match hadn't taken place yet, that he was safe in bed, and that the Slytherin team definitely wouldn't be allowed to play on dragons. He was feeling very thirsty. Quietly as he could, he got out of his four-poster and went to pour himself some water from the silver jug beneath the window.

The grounds were still and quiet. No breath of wind disturbed the treetops in the Forbidden Forest; the Whomping Willow was motionless and innocent-looking. It looked as though the conditions for the match would be perfect.

Harry set down his goblet and was about to turn back to his bed when something caught his eye. An animal of some kind was prowling across the silvery lawn.

Harry dashed to his bedside table, snatched up his glasses, and put them on, then hurried back to the window. It couldn't be the Grim — not now — not right before the match —

He peered out at the grounds again and, after a minute's frantic searching, spotted it. It was skirting the edge of the forest now. . . . It wasn't the Grim at all . . . it was a cat. . . . Harry clutched the window ledge in relief as he recognized the bottlebrush tail. It was only Crookshanks. . . .

Or *was* it only Crookshanks? Harry squinted, pressing his nose flat

against the glass. Crookshanks seemed to have come to a halt. Harry was sure he could see something else moving in the shadow of the trees too.

And just then, it emerged — a gigantic, shaggy black dog, moving stealthily across the lawn, Crookshanks trotting at its side. Harry stared. What did this mean? If Crookshanks could see the dog as well, how could it be an omen of Harry's death?

"Ron!" Harry hissed. "Ron! Wake up!"

"Huh?"

"I need you to tell me if you can see something!"

"S'all dark, Harry," Ron muttered thickly. "What're you on about?"

"Down here —"

Harry looked quickly back out of the window.

Crookshanks and the dog had vanished. Harry climbed onto the windowsill to look right down into the shadows of the castle, but they weren't there. Where had they gone?

A loud snore told him Ron had fallen asleep again.

Harry and the rest of the Gryffindor team entered the Great Hall the next day to enormous applause. Harry couldn't help grinning broadly as he saw that both the Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff tables were applauding them too. The Slytherin table hissed loudly as they passed. Harry noticed that Malfoy looked even paler than usual.

Wood spent the whole of breakfast urging his team to eat, while touching nothing himself. Then he hurried them off to the field before anyone else had finished, so they could get an idea of the conditions.

As they left the Great Hall, everyone applauded again.

“Good luck, Harry!” called Cho. Harry felt himself blushing.

“Okay — no wind to speak of — sun’s a bit bright, that could impair your vision, watch out for it — ground’s fairly hard, good, that’ll give us a fast kickoff —”

Wood paced the field, staring around with the team behind him. Finally, they saw the front doors of the castle open in the distance and the rest of the school spilling onto the lawn.

“Locker rooms,” said Wood tersely.

None of them spoke as they changed into their scarlet robes. Harry wondered if they were feeling like he was: as though he’d eaten something extremely wriggly for breakfast. In what seemed like no time at all, Wood was saying, “Okay, it’s time, let’s go —”

They walked out onto the field to a tidal wave of noise. Three-quarters of the crowd were wearing scarlet rosettes, waving scarlet flags with the Gryffindor lion upon them, or brandishing banners with slogans like “GO GRYFFINDOR!” and “LIONS FOR THE CUP!” Behind the Slytherin goalposts, however, two hundred people were wearing green; the silver serpent of Slytherin glittered on their flags, and Professor Snape sat in the very front row, wearing green like everyone else, and a very grim smile.

“And here are the Gryffindors!” yelled Lee Jordan, who was acting as commentator as usual. “Potter, Bell, Johnson, Spinnet, Weasley, Weasley, and Wood. Widely acknowledged as the best team Hogwarts has seen in a good few years —”

Lee’s comments were drowned by a tide of “boos” from the Slytherin end.

“And here come the Slytherin team, led by Captain Flint. He’s made some changes in the lineup and seems to be going for size rather than skill —”

More boos from the Slytherin crowd. Harry, however, thought Lee had a point. Malfoy was easily the smallest person on the Slytherin team; the rest of them were enormous.

“Captains, shake hands!” said Madam Hooch.

Flint and Wood approached each other and grasped each other’s hand very tightly; it looked as though each was trying to break the other’s fingers.

“Mount your brooms!” said Madam Hooch. “Three . . . two . . . one . . .”

The sound of her whistle was lost in the roar from the crowd as fourteen brooms rose into the air. Harry felt his hair fly back off his forehead; his nerves left him in the thrill of the flight; he glanced around, saw Malfoy on his tail, and sped off in search of the Snitch.

“And it’s Gryffindor in possession, Alicia Spinnet of Gryffindor with the Quaffle, heading straight for the Slytherin goalposts, looking good. Alicia! Argh, no — Quaffle intercepted by Warrington, Warrington of Slytherin tearing up the field — WHAM! — nice Bludger work there by George Weasley, Warrington drops the Quaffle, it’s caught by — Johnson, Gryffindor back in possession, come on, Angelina — nice swerve around Montague — *duck, Angelina, that’s a Bludger!* — SHE SCORES! TEN-ZERO TO GRYFFINDOR!”

Angelina punched the air as she soared around the end of the field; the sea of scarlet below was screaming its delight —

“OUCH!”

Angelina was nearly thrown from her broom as Marcus Flint went smashing into her.

“Sorry!” said Flint as the crowd below booed. “Sorry, didn’t see her!”

A moment later, Fred Weasley chucked his Beater’s club at the back of Flint’s head. Flint’s nose smashed into the handle of his broom and began to bleed.

“That will do!” shrieked Madam Hooch, zooming between them. “Penalty shot to Gryffindor for an unprovoked attack on their Chaser! Penalty shot to Slytherin for deliberate damage to *their* Chaser!”

“Come off it, miss!” howled Fred, but Madam Hooch blew her whistle and Alicia flew forward to take the penalty.

“Come on, Alicia!” yelled Lee into the silence that had descended on the crowd. “YES! SHE’S BEATEN THE KEEPER! TWENTY—ZERO TO GRYFFINDOR!”

Harry turned the Firebolt sharply to watch Flint, still bleeding freely, fly forward to take the Slytherin penalty. Wood was hovering in front of the Gryffindor goalposts, his jaw clenched.

“Course, Wood’s a superb Keeper!” Lee Jordan told the crowd as Flint waited for Madam Hooch’s whistle. “Superb! Very difficult to pass — very difficult indeed — YES! I DON’T BELIEVE IT! HE’S SAVED IT!”

Relieved, Harry zoomed away, gazing around for the Snitch, but still making sure he caught every word of Lee’s commentary. It was essential that he hold Malfoy off the Snitch until Gryffindor was more than fifty points up —

“Gryffindor in possession, no, Slytherin in possession — no! — Gryffindor back in possession and it’s Katie Bell, Katie Bell for Gryffindor with the Quaffle, she’s streaking up the field — THAT WAS DELIBERATE!”

Montague, a Slytherin Chaser, had swerved in front of Katie, and instead of seizing the Quaffle had grabbed her head. Katie cartwheeled in the air, managed to stay on her broom, but dropped the Quaffle.

Madam Hooch’s whistle rang out again as she soared over to Montague and began shouting at him. A minute later, Katie had put another penalty past the Slytherin Keeper.

“THIRTY-ZERO! TAKE THAT, YOU DIRTY, CHEATING —”

“Jordan, if you can’t commentate in an unbiased way — !”

“I’m telling it like it is, Professor!”

Harry felt a huge jolt of excitement. He had seen the Snitch — it was shimmering at the foot of one of the Gryffindor goalposts — but he mustn’t catch it yet — and if Malfoy saw it —

Faking a look of sudden concentration, Harry pulled his Firebolt around and sped off toward the Slytherin end — it worked. Malfoy went haring after him, clearly thinking Harry had seen the Snitch there. . . .

WHOOSH.

One of the Bludgers came streaking past Harry’s right ear, hit by the gigantic Slytherin Beater, Derrick. Then again —

WHOOSH.

The second Bludger grazed Harry’s elbow. The other Beater, Bole, was closing in.

Harry had a fleeting glimpse of Bole and Derrick zooming toward him, clubs raised —

He turned the Firebolt upward at the last second, and Bole and Derrick collided with a sickening crunch.

“Ha haaa!” yelled Lee Jordan as the Slytherin Beaters lurched away from each other, clutching their heads. “Too bad, boys! You’ll need to get up earlier than that to beat a Firebolt! And it’s Gryffindor in possession again, as Johnson takes the Quaffle — Flint alongside her — poke him in the eye, Angelina! — it was a joke, Professor, it was a joke — oh no — Flint in possession, Flint flying toward the Gryffindor goalposts, come on now, Wood, save — !”

But Flint had scored; there was an eruption of cheers from the Slytherin end, and Lee swore so badly that Professor McGonagall tried to tug the magical megaphone away from him.

“Sorry, Professor, sorry! Won’t happen again! So, Gryffindor in the lead, thirty points to ten, and Gryffindor in possession —”

It was turning into the dirtiest game Harry had ever played in. Enraged that Gryffindor had taken such an early lead, the Slytherins were rapidly resorting to any means to take the Quaffle. Bole hit Alicia with his club and tried to say he’d thought she was a Bludger. George Weasley elbowed Bole in the face in retaliation. Madam Hooch awarded both teams penalties, and Wood pulled off another spectacular save, making the score forty–ten to Gryffindor.

The Snitch had disappeared again. Malfoy was still keeping close to Harry as he soared over the match, looking around for it — once Gryffindor was fifty points ahead —

Katie scored. Fifty–ten. Fred and George Weasley were swooping

around her; clubs raised, in case any of the Slytherins were thinking of revenge. Bole and Derrick took advantage of Fred's and George's absence to aim both Bludgers at Wood; they caught him in the stomach, one after the other, and he rolled over in the air, clutching his broom, completely winded.

Madam Hooch was beside herself.

"YOU DO NOT ATTACK THE KEEPER UNLESS THE QUAFFLE IS WITHIN THE SCORING AREA!" she shrieked at Bole and Derrick. "Gryffindor penalty!"

And Angelina scored. Sixty-ten. Moments later, Fred Weasley pelted a Bludger at Warrington, knocking the Quaffle out of his hands; Alicia seized it and put it through the Slytherin goal — seventy-ten.

The Gryffindor crowd below was screaming itself hoarse — Gryffindor was sixty points in the lead, and if Harry caught the Snitch now, the Cup was theirs. Harry could almost feel hundreds of eyes following him as he soared around the field, high above the rest of the game, with Malfoy speeding along behind him.

And then he saw it. The Snitch was sparkling twenty feet above him.

Harry put on a huge burst of speed; the wind was roaring in his ears; he stretched out his hand, but suddenly, the Firebolt was slowing down —

Horrified, he looked around. Malfoy had thrown himself forward, grabbed hold of the Firebolt's tail, and was pulling it back.

"You —"

Harry was angry enough to hit Malfoy, but couldn't reach — Malfoy was panting with the effort of holding onto the Firebolt, but

his eyes were sparkling maliciously. He had achieved what he'd wanted to do — the Snitch had disappeared again.

“Penalty! Penalty to Gryffindor! I’ve never seen such tactics!” Madam Hooch screeched, shooting up to where Malfoy was sliding back onto his Nimbus Two Thousand and One.

“YOU CHEATING SCUM!” Lee Jordan was howling into the megaphone, dancing out of Professor McGonagall’s reach. “YOU FILTHY, CHEATING B —”

Professor McGonagall didn’t even bother to tell him off. She was actually shaking her finger in Malfoy’s direction, her hat had fallen off, and she too was shouting furiously.

Alicia took Gryffindor’s penalty, but she was so angry she missed by several feet. The Gryffindor team was losing concentration and the Slytherins, delighted by Malfoy’s foul on Harry, were being spurred on to greater heights.

“Slytherin in possession, Slytherin heading for goal — Montague scores —” Lee groaned. “Seventy–twenty to Gryffindor. . . .”

Harry was now marking Malfoy so closely their knees kept hitting each other. Harry wasn’t going to let Malfoy anywhere near the Snitch. . . .

“Get out of it, Potter!” Malfoy yelled in frustration as he tried to turn and found Harry blocking him.

“Angelina Johnson gets the Quaffle for Gryffindor, come on, Angelina, COME ON!”

Harry looked around. Every single Slytherin player apart from Malfoy was streaking up the pitch toward Angelina, including the Slytherin Keeper — they were all going to block her —

Harry wheeled the Firebolt around, bent so low he was lying flat along the handle, and kicked it forward. Like a bullet, he shot toward the Slytherins.

“AAAAAAARRRGH!”

They scattered as the Firebolt zoomed toward them; Angelina’s way was clear.

“SHE SCORES! SHE SCORES! Gryffindor leads by eighty points to twenty!”

Harry, who had almost pelted headlong into the stands, skidded to a halt in midair, reversed, and zoomed back into the middle of the field.

And then he saw something to make his heart stand still: Malfoy was diving, a look of triumph on his face — there, a few feet above the grass below, was a tiny, golden glimmer —

Harry urged the Firebolt downward, but Malfoy was miles ahead —

“Go! Go! Go!” Harry urged his broom. He was gaining on Malfoy — Harry flattened himself to the broom handle as Bole sent a Bludger at him — he was at Malfoy’s ankles — he was level —

Harry threw himself forward, taking both hands off his broom. He knocked Malfoy’s arm out of the way and —

“YES!”

He pulled out of his dive, his hand in the air, and the stadium exploded. Harry soared above the crowd, an odd ringing in his ears. The tiny golden ball was held tight in his fist, beating its wings hopelessly against his fingers.

Then Wood was speeding toward him, half-blinded by tears; he

seized Harry around the neck and sobbed unrestrainedly into his shoulder. Harry felt two large thumps as Fred and George hit them; then Angelina's, Alicia's, and Katie's voices, "*We've won the Cup! We've won the Cup!*" Tangled together in a many-armed hug, the Gryffindor team sank, yelling hoarsely, back to earth.

Wave upon wave of crimson supporters was pouring over the barriers onto the field. Hands were raining down on their backs. Harry had a confused impression of noise and bodies pressing in on him. Then he, and the rest of the team, were hoisted onto the shoulders of the crowd. Thrust into the light, he saw Hagrid, plastered with crimson rosettes — "Yeh beat 'em, Harry, yeh beat 'em! Wait till I tell Buckbeak!" There was Percy, jumping up and down like a maniac, all dignity forgotten. Professor McGonagall was sobbing harder even than Wood, wiping her eyes with an enormous Gryffindor flag; and there, fighting their way toward Harry, were Ron and Hermione. Words failed them. They simply beamed as Harry was borne toward the stands, where Dumbledore stood waiting with the enormous Quidditch Cup.

If only there had been a dementor around. . . . As a sobbing Wood passed Harry the Cup, as he lifted it into the air, Harry felt he could have produced the world's best Patronus

Die Kwiddiek-eindstryd

“Hy – hy het dit vir my gestuur,” sê Hermien en hou die brief uit.

Harry neem dit by haar. Die perkament is klam en yslike druppels trane het die ink plek-plek so laat vloei dat dit moeilik is om te lees.

Liewe Hermien,

Ons het verloor. Ek mag hom terug Hogwarts toe bring. Datum van terugstelling moet nog bepaal word.

Bokkie het van Londen ghou.

Ek sal al die hulp wat jy ons gegee het, nooit vergeet nie.

Hagrid

“Hulle kan dit nie doen nie,” sê Harry. “Hulle kan net nie. Bokbok is nie gevaarlik nie.”

“Malfoy se pa het die komitee bang gepraat,” sê Hermien terwyl sy haar oë afvee. “Julle weet hoe hy is. Hulle is ’n ou spul sukkelaars en hulle is bang. Daar sal ’n appel wees, daar is altyd. Dis net dat daar geen hoop is nie . . . niks sal verander nie.”

“Ja, dit sal,” sê Ron kwaai. “Hierdie keer hoef jy nie al die werk te doen nie, Hermien. Ek gaan jou help.”

“O, Ron!”

Hermien gooi haar arms om Ron se nek en bars in trane uit. Ron, wat heel verskrik lyk, tik-tik haar ongemaklik op die kop. Uiteindelik bedaar Hermien.

“Ron, ek is baie, baie jammer oor Skille . . .” snik sy.

“O – wel – hy was oud,” sê Ron, wat omtrent verlig lyk toe sy hom laat los. “En hy was maar min werd. ’n Mens weet nooit, dalk gee my ma en pa nou vir my ’n uil.”

Die veiligheidsmaatreëls wat na Swardt se tweede inbraak aan die studente opgedwing is, sorg dat dit vir Harry, Ron en Hermien onmoontlik is om saans vir Hagrid te gaan kuier. Die enigste kans wat hulle het om met hom te praat, is tydens die Versorging van Magiese Creature-klas.

Hy lyk heeltemal verslae oor die vonnis.

“Is alles my skuld. Kon nie ’n woord uitkry nie. Hulle sit almal daar in hulle swart klere en ek laat aanmekaar my notas val en vergeet aanhou daai datums wat jy vir my opgesoek het, Hermien. En toe staan Lucius Malfoy op en hy begin praat en toe maak die komitee nes hy gesê het . . .”

“Daar is darem nog die appêl!” sê Ron ferm. “Moenie moed opgee nie, ons gaan werk maak daarvan!”

Hulle stap saam met die res van die klas terug kasteel toe. Voor hulle sien hulle vir Malfoy wat saam met Krabbe en Goliat loop en die hele tyd omkyk en minagtend lag.

“Ga’nie help nie, Ron,” sê Hagrid hartseer toe hulle by die trappe voor die kasteel kom. “Daardie komitee is in Lucius Malfoy se sak. Ek kan net sorg dat die res van Bokkie se tyd die beste is wat hy nog ooit gehad het. Ek skuld hom dit . . .”

Hagrid draai om en haas hom terug na sy hut met sy gesig in sy sakdoek.

“Kyk net hoe tjank hy!”

Malfoy, Krabbe en Goliat het binne die kasteel se deure gestaan en luister.

“Het julle al ooit iets so *pateties* gesien?” sê Malfoy. “En dan’s hy kamma ons onderwyser!”

Sowel Harry as Ron beweeg woedend op Malfoy af, maar Hermien is eerste daar –

KLAP!

Sy slaan vir Malfoy met al haar krag deur die gesig. Malfoy steier agteroor. Harry, Ron, Krabbe en Goliat kan net oorbluf kyk toe Hermien haar hand nog ’n keer lig.

“Noem ooit weer vir Hagrid *pateties*, jou vieslike – jou mislike –”

“Hermien,” sê Ron swakkies, en probeer om haar hand te gryp toe sy dit terugswaai.

“Los my, Ron!”

Hermien pluk haar towerstaf uit. Malfoy val terug. Krabbe en Goliat kyk verwilderd na hom vir opdragte.

“Komaan,” brom Malfoy en die volgende oomblik verdwyn die drestuks in die gang wat na die kerkers lei.

“Hermien!” sê Ron weer en hy klink sowel verstom as beïndruk.

“Harry, jy moet hom opdots in die Kwiddiek-eindstryd!” sê Hermien skril. “Jy moet net, want ek sal dit nie kan vat as Slibberin moet wen nie!”

“Ons is laat vir Towerspreuke,” sê Ron wat nog steeds met groot oë na Hermien kyk. “Ons beter opskud.”

Hulle draf inderhaas op met die marmertrappe na professor Flickerpitt se klaskamer.

“Julle is laat, seuns!” sê professor Flickerpitt verwyttend toe Harry die klaskamer se deur oopstoot. “Komaan, opskud, towerstawwe gereed, ons eksperimenteer vandag met Opkikker-towerspreuke. Ons het reeds in pare verdeel –”

Harry en Ron haas hulle na ’n lessenaar agter in die klas en maak hul tasse oop. Ron kyk om hom rond.

“Waar’s Hermien?”

Harry kyk ook rond. Hermien is nie in die klaskamer nie, maar Harry weet dat sy langs hom was toe hy die deur oopgemaak het.

“Dis snaaks,” sê Harry en staar na Ron. “Miskien – miskien het sy badkamer toe gegaan of iets?”

Hermien daag egter nie vir die les op nie.

“Sy kan doen met ’n Opkikker-towerspreuk,” sê Ron toe die klas met breë glimlagte uitstap vir middagete – die Opkikker-towerspreuk het almal sommer baie goed laat voel.

Hermien is ook nie aan die etenstafel nie. Teen die tyd dat hulle hul appeltert opgeëet het, is die Opkikker-towerspreuk reeds amper uitgewerk en begin Harry en Ron ’n bietjie bekommerd raak.

“Dink jy Malfoy het dalk iets aan haar gedoen?” sê Ron benoud toe hulle die trappe na die Griffindortoring haastig uitklim.

Hulle gaan verby die sekuriteitstrolle, gee vir die Vet Vrou die wagwoord (“Kekkelbek”) en skarrel deur die portretopening na die geselskamer.

Hermien sit by ’n tafel. Sy is vas aan die slaap en haar kop rus op ’n Rekenmatiekboek wat oop voor haar lê. Hulle gaan sit aan weerskante van haar en Harry skud haar wakker.

“W-wat?” sê Hermien toe sy met ’n ruk wakker word, en sy kyk verward om haar. “Is dit tyd om te gaan? W-watter klas het ons nou?”

“Waarsêery, maar eers oor twintig minute,” sê Harry. “Hermien, hoekom was jy nie by Towerspreuke nie?”

“Wat? O nee!” kerm Hermien. “Ek het vergeet om na Towerspreuke toe te gaan!”

“Maar hoe kon jy vergeet het?” sê Harry. “Jy was nog by ons toe ons reg voor die klaskamer was!”

“Ek glo dit nie!” kla Hermien. “Was professor Flickerpitt kwaad? O, dit was daardie Malfoy, ek het aan hom gedink en heeltemal tred verloor met dinge!”

“Weet jy wat, Hermien?” sê Ron, en hy kyk na die tamaai Rekenmatiekboek wat Hermien as ’n kussing gebruik het. “Ek dink jy’s besig om op te pak. Jy wil te veel doen.”

“Nee, ek wil nie!” sê Hermien terwyl sy haar hare uit haar oë vee en ietwat hulpeloos na haar tas soek. “Ek het net ’n fout gemaak, dis al. Ek moet vir professor Flickerpitt gaan sien en om verskoning vra . . . Sien julle by Waarsêery!”

Twintig minute later sluit Hermien by hulle aan, aan die voet van die leer wat na professor Trelawney se klaskamer lei. Sy lyk behoorlik omgekrap.

“Ek kan nie glo dat ek die Opkikker-towerspreuke gemis het nie! Ek wed dit gaan in die eksamen wees. Professor Flickerpitt het so iets laat val!”

Hulle klim saam-saam op na die dofverligte, bedompige toringkamer. Op elke klein tafeltjie gloei 'n kristalbal vol përelagtige wit mis. Harry, Ron en Hermien gaan sit saam by 'n lendelam tafeltjie.

“Ek het gedink ons gaan eers volgende kwartaal met kristalballes begin,” brom Ron terwyl hy behoedsaam rondkyk ingeval professor Trelawney lewers in die omgewing is.

“Moenie kla nie, dit beteken ons is klaar met handlesery,” mompel Harry. “Ek is siek en sat van hoe sy inmeekaarkrimp elke keer dat sy na my hande kyk.”

“Goeiedag, julle almal!” sê die bekende, mistige stem en professor Trelawney maak haar gewone dramatiese verskyning vanuit die skaduwees. Parvati en Hildegard bewe van opwinding, hul gesigte verlig deur die melkerige gloed wat uit hul kristalbal straal.

“Ek het besluit om 'n bietjie vroeër as wat ek oorspronklik beplan het met die kristalbal te begin,” sê professor Trelawney terwyl sy met haar rug na die vuur gaan sit en om haar kyk. “Die noodlot het my laat verstaan dat julle Junie-eksamen die Sfeer gaan insluit en ek is gretig om julle genoeg te laat oefen.”

Hermien snork.

“Wel, wraggies . . . ‘die noodlot het my laat verstaan’ . . . wie stel mis-kien die vraestel op? Niemand anders as sy nie! Wat 'n ongelooflike voor-spelling!” sê sy sonder om eens haar stem te laat sak.

Dit is moeilik om te sê of professor Trelawney dit gehoor het, want haar gesig is versteek in die skaduwees. Sy gaan egter voort asof sy niks agtergekom het nie.

“Kristalkykery is 'n besonder verfynde kunsvorm,” sê sy dromerig. “Ek verwag nie dat enige van julle iets sal sien wanneer julle vir die eerste keer in die Sfeer se onpeilbare dieptes tuur nie. Ons gaan begin deur te oefen hoe om die bewuste self en die uitwendige oë te laat ontspan” – Ron begin onbedaarlik giggel en moet sy vuus in sy mond druk om die geluid te demp – “om sodoende die Innerlike Oog en die superbewussyn te laat ontspan. Dalk, as ons gelukkig is, sal party van julle voor die einde van die klas kan sien.”

Toe begin hulle. Harry voel uiters sotlik terwyl hy bot in die kristalbal staar en sukkel om nie goed soos “dit is simpel” te dink nie. Dit help nie dat Ron aanhoudend onderlangs giggel, terwyl Hermien aanmekaar st! st! sê nie.

“Al iets gesien?” vra Harry vir hulle na hulle vir 'n kwartier in die kristal gekyk het.

“Ja, daar’s ’n brandmerk op die tafel,” sê Ron en wys daarna. “Iemand het met sy kers gespeel.”

“Dit is so ’n mors van tyd,” sis Hermien. “Ek kon eerder iets nuttige ge oefen het. Ek kon my Opkikker-towerspreuke ingehaal het –”

Professor Trelawney kom ritselend verbygestap.

“Wil enigiemand hê dat ek hulle moet help om die skaduagtige voor tekens van hul Sfeer te interpreteer?” murmel sy bo die geklingel van haar armbande.

“Ek het nie hulp nodig nie,” fluister Ron. “Dis tog duidelik wat dit be teken. Daar gaan vannag tonne mis wees.”

Sowel Harry as Hermien bars uit van die lag.

“Toe nou!” sê professor Trelawney toe almal se koppe na hulle draai. Parvati en Hildegard lyk geskok. “Julle versteur die heldersiene vibra sies!” Sy stap na hul tafel en tuur na hul kristalbal. Harry voel hoe sy hart sink. Hy weet wat om te verwag . . .

“Daar is iets hier!” fluister professor Trelawney en haar kop sak tot teen die bal sodat dit in albei brilglase weerkaats word. “Hier is iets wat beweeg . . . wat kan dit wees?”

Harry is bereid om alles wat hy besit, selfs die Vuurslag, daarop te ver wed dat dit nie goeie nuus is nie, wat dit ook al mag wees. En sowaar . . .

“My skat . . .” sê professor Trelawney hees terwyl sy stup na Harry kyk. “Dit is hier, duideliker as tevore . . . My skat, dit sluip nader aan jou, nader en nader . . . die Gr–”

“Ag, genadetjie tog!” sê Hermien hard. “Tog nie weer daardie verspotte Grim nie!”

Professor Trelawney lig haar enorme oë na Hermien se gesig. Parvati fluister iets vir Hildegard en hulle gluur albei na Hermien. Professor Tre lawney kom orent en staar met onverbloemde ergernis na haar.

“Ek is jammer om dit te moet sê, maar van die oomblik dat jy by my klas ingestap het, *skat*, was dit duidelik dat jy nie oor die gawes beskik wat jy vir die verhewe kuns van die Waarsêery nodig het nie. Om die waarheid te sê, ek dink nie ek het al ooit ’n student teëgekom wie se brein so absoluut aards is nie.”

Daar is ’n oomblik se stilte. Toe –

“Goed!” sê Hermien skielik terwyl sy opstaan en *Ontnewel die Toekoms* terug in haar tas pak. “Goed!” herhaal sy, terwyl sy die tas oor haar skou er slinger en amper vir Ron van sy stoel afstamp. “Ek gee bes! Ek loop!”

Tot die hele klas se verbasing stap Hermien na die valdeur, skop dit oop, klim met die leer af en verdwyn uit sig.

Dit neem ’n hele paar minute voor die klas tot bedaring kom. Dit lyk asof professor Trelawney heeltemal van die Grim vergeet het. Sy draai meteens van Harry en Ron se tafel af weg terwyl sy hard asemhaal en haar gaserige sjaal stywer om haar trek.

“Oeeee!” sê Hildegard skielik sodat almal skrik. “Oeeee, professor Trelawney, ek het so pas onthou! U het gesien dat sy sal weggaan, of hoe? U het, of hoe, professor? *Rondom Pase sal een van julle ons vir goed verlaat!*” U het dit eeue gelede gesê, professor!”

Professor Trelawney glimlag stroperig vir haar.

“Ja, my skat, ek het inderdaad geweet dat mej. La Grange ons sal verlaat. ’n Mens hoop natuurlik dat jy die tekens verkeerd gelees het . . . die Innerlike Oog kan ’n las wees, weet jy . . .”

Hildegard en Parvati lyk diep beïndruk en maak plek sodat professor Trelawney by hul tafel kan kom sit.

“Hermien het omtrent ’n af dag, of hoe?” brom Ron vol ontsag vir Harry.

“H’m . . .”

Harry tuur na die kristalbal, maar sien niks anders as warrelende wit mis nie. Het professor Trelawney regtig weer die Grim gesien? Gaan hy dit sien? Nog ’n amper noodlottige ongeluk is die laaste ding wat hy nodig het met die Kwiddiek-eindstryd net om die draai.

Die Paasvakansie is nie veel van ’n blaaskans nie. Die derdejaars het nog nooit soveel huiswerk gehad nie. Neville Loggerenberg is op die rand van ’n senuwee-ineenstorting en hy is nie die enigste een nie.

“Is dit nou kamma ’n vakansie!” bulder Septimus Floris een middag in die geselskamer. “Die eksamen is nog eeue ver, wat probeer hulle regkry?”

Niemand het egter soveel werk soos Hermien nie. Selfs sonder Waar-sêery het sy meer vakke as enigiemand anders. Sy is gewoonlik die laaste persoon wat die geselskamer saans verlaat en die eerste om die volgende oggend in die biblioteek aan te kom. Net soos Lupin het sy skaduwees onder haar oë, en sy is die hele tyd op die rand van tranes.

Ron het die verantwoordelikheid vir Bokbok se appèl op sy skouers geneem. Wanneer hy nie sy eie werk doen nie, blaai hy deur geweldige dik boeke met titels soos *Die Handboek van Hippogrieffsielkunde* en *Vuilspel of Voëlvry? ’n Studie van Hippogrieffbrutaliteit*. Hy is so geïnteresseerd dat hy skoon vergeet om met Kromskeen goor te wees.

Harry moet sy huiswerk by elke dag se Kwiddiek-oefensessie inpas, sowel as by Wood se eindelose gesprekke oor taktiek. Die Griffindor-Slibberin-wedstryd is vir die eerste Saterdag na die Paasvakansie gereël. Slibberin loop met presies tweehonderd punte voor. Dit beteken (soos Wood sy span gedurig herinner) dat hulle die wedstryd met meer as dit moet wen om die Beker te verower. Dit beteken ook dat die verantwoordelikheid grootliks op Harry val, want die Snip is ’n honderd-en-vyftig punte werd as hy gevang word.

“Jy moet dit *net* vang as ons met meer as vyftig punte voorloop,” sê Wood die hele tyd vir Harry. “Alleenlik as ons met meer as vyftig punte

voor is, Harry, anders wen ons die wedstryd, maar ons verloor die Beker. Jy het dit, of hoe? Jy moet die Snip net vang as ons –”

“EK WEET, OLIVER!” gil Harry.

Die hele Huis Griffindor is behep met die komende wedstryd. Griffindor het die Kwiddiekbeker laas gewen toe die legendariese Charlie Weasley (Ron se tweede oudste broer) hul Soeker was. Harry twyfel egter of enigeen van hulle, selfs Wood, so graag soos hy wil wen. Die vyandskap tussen Harry en Malfoy het ’n hoogtepunt bereik. Malfoy is nog steeds dikbek oor die moddergooiery by Hogsmeade en nog kwater omdat Harry dit reggekry het om sy straf vry te spring. Harry het nog nie Malfoy se poging om hom tydens die wedstryd teen Raweklou te saboteer vergeet nie, maar dit is die kwessie van Bokbok wat hom die meeste motiveer om Malfoy voor die hele skool te verneder.

Nog nooit, sover enigeen kan onthou, het die gemoedere voor ’n wedstryd al so hoog geloop nie. Teen die tyd dat die vakansie verby is, is die spanning tussen die twee spanne en hul huise digby breekpunt. Klein onderonsies breek gedurig in die gange uit, en loop uit op ’n nare insident waarin ’n Griffindor-vierdejaar en ’n Slibberi-sesdejaar in die siekeboeg beland met preie wat uit hul ore groei.

Harry het ’n besonder moeilike tyd. Hy kan nie klas toe loop sonder dat van die Slibberins hul bene uitsteek en hom probeer pootjie nie; Krabbe en Goliat duik oral waar hy gaan op en slof teleurgesteld weg wanneer hulle sien dat hy deur mense omring is. Wood het opdrag gegee dat Harry nooit alleen mag wees nie, ingeval die Slibberins hom buite aksie probeer stel. Die hele Griffindor-huis het die uitdaging met oorgawe aanvaar en Harry vind dit onmoontlik om betyds vir sy klasse te wees, want hy is gedurig omring deur ’n groot, geselsende skare. Harry is egter meer bekommerd oor die Vuurslag se veiligheid as oor sy eie. Wanneer hy nie daarop vlieg nie, hou hy dit veilig toegesluit in sy trommel, en pouses haas hy hom terug na die Griffindortoring om seker te maak dat dit nog daar is.

Die aand voor die wedstryd word alle gewone bedrywighede in die Griffindor-geselskamer gestaak. Tot Hermien stoot haar boeke opsy.

“Ek kan nie werk nie, ek kan nie konsentreer nie,” sê sy senuagtig.

Dit is baie lawaaiërig. Fred en George Weasley hanteer die druk deur nog meer raserig en uitgelate as gewoonlik te wees. Oliver Wood sit in ’n hoek gehurk oor ’n model van ’n Kwiddiekveld en jaag klein figuurtjies met sy towerstaf rond. Angelina, Alicia en Katie lag vir Fred en George se grappe. Harry sit eenkant weg van alles by Ron en Hermien en doen sy bes om nie aan die volgende dag te dink nie, want elke keer dat hy daaraan dink, kry hy hierdie aaklige gevoel dat iets baie groots uit sy maag wil spring.

“Jy gaan oukei wees,” sê Hermien vir hom, hoewel sy tot die dood toe verskrik lyk.

“Jy het ’n Vuurslag!” sê Ron.

“H’m . . .” sê Harry en sy maag trek saam.

Dit is ’n groot verligting toe Wood skielik opstaan en skree, “Span! Slaapyd!”

Harry slaap sleg. Eers droom hy dat hy verslaap het en dat Wood “Waar was jy? Ons moes vir Neville gebruik het!” op hom skree. Toe droom hy dat Malfoy en die res van die Slibberins op drake by die wedstryd opdaag. Hy vlieg teen ’n asemenemende spoed om weg te kom van die vlamme wat uit Malfoy se ryding se mond spuit, toe hy skielik besef dat hy sy Vuurslag by die huis vergeet het. Hy trek deur die lug en word met ’n slag wakker.

Dit neem ’n hele paar sekondes voor Harry onthou dat hulle die wedstryd nog moet speel, dat hy veilig in die bed is en dat die Slibberinspan beslis nie op drake sal mag ry nie. Hy is baie dors. Hy klim so stil moontlik uit sy hemelbed en stap na die venster om vir hom water uit die silwer beker te skink.

Die terrein is doodstil. Nie ’n briesie roer in die boomtoppe in die Verbode Woud nie; die Woelige Wilg staan stokstil en lyk heeltemal onskadelik. Dit lyk na perfekte toestande vir ’n wedstryd.

Harry sit sy drinkbeker neer en is op die punt om terug na sy bed te gaan toe sy oog iets vang. ’n Dier van die een of ander aard dwaal oor die silwerige grasperk.

Harry haas hom na sy bedkassie, gryp sy bril; sit dit op en gaan vinnig terug na die venster. Dit kan nie die Grim wees nie – nie nou nie – nie kort voor die wedstryd nie –

Weer loer hy na die terrein en na ’n paar minute se benoude gesoek, sien hy dit. Dit is op die rand van die Woud . . . dit is nie die Grim nie . . . dis ’n kat . . . Harry gryp die vensterbank uit pure verligting vas toe hy die borselstert herken. Dis maar net Kromskeen . . .

Of is dit maar net Kromskeen? Harry trek sy oë op skrefies en druk sy neus plat teen die ruit. Dit lyk asof Kromskeen gaan staan het. Harry is seker hy het iets anders in die skaduwee van die bome sien beweeg.

Die volgende oomblik verskyn dit: ’n reusagtige, harige swart hond wat suutjies oor die grasperk sluip met Kromskeen op sy hakke. Harry gaap hulle aan. Wat beteken dit? As Kromskeen ook die hond kan sien, kan dit mos nie ’n voorbode van Harry se dood wees nie?

“Ron!” sis Harry. “Ron! Word wakker!”

“He?”

“Kom kyk gou of jy ook iets kan sien!”

“Dis donker, Harry,” mompel Ron slaperig. “Wat is dit?”

"Hier onder –"

Harry kyk weer vinnig deur die venster.

Sowel Kromskeen as die hond het verdwyn. Harry klouter op die vensterbank sodat hy onder in die skaduwees om die kasteel kan kyk, maar hulle is nie daar nie. Waar kan hulle wees?

'n Harde snorkgeluid laat hom besef dat Ron weer vas aan die slaap is.

Die volgende oggend gaan Harry en die res van die Griffindorspan die Groot Saal onder luide toejuiging binne. Harry kan nie anders as om breed te glimlag toe hy sien dat Raweklou en Hoesenproes se tafels ook vir hulle hande klap nie. Die Slibberintafel sis luidkeels toe hulle verbystap. Harry let op dat Malfoy nog bleker as gewoonlik lyk.

Die hele tyd tydens ontbyt moedig Wood sy span aan om te eet, terwyl hy self aan niks raak nie. Toe jaag hy hulle veld toe voor enigiemand anders klaar is sodat hulle 'n idee van die toestande kan kry. Toe hulle die Groot Saal verlaat, klap almal opnuut hande.

"Sterkte, Harry!" roep Cho Chang. Harry voel hoe hy bloos.

"Goed . . . geen wind om van te praat nie . . . son is 'n bietjie skerp, dit kan jul visie belemmer, wees maar versigtig . . . grond is redelik hard, mooi, dit sal ons lekker vinnig laat wegskop . . ."

Wood loop oor die veld en kyk oral om hom rond, terwyl die span agter hom aan stap. Uiteindelik sien hulle hoe die kasteel se voordeur in die verte oopgaan en hoe die res van die skool oor die grasperk stroom.

"Kleedkamers," sê Wood gespanne.

Niemand praat terwyl hulle hul skarlakenrooi klere aantrek nie. Harry wonder of die ander ook soos hy voel: asof hy iets vir ontbyt gehad het wat besonder kriewelrig is. Te gou sê Wood, "Oukei, dis tyd, kom ons gaan . . ."

Onder 'n golf van toejuiging loop hulle op die veld. Driekwart van die skare dra rooi rosette, waai skarlakenrooi vlae met die Griffindorleeu op of wuif baniere met slagspreuke soos "NOU, GRIFFINDOR!" en "DIE LEEUS VIR DIE BEKER!" Agter Slibberin se doelpale is daar egter om-trent tweehonderd mense in groen klere; Slibberin se silwer slang glinster op hul vlae en professor Snerp sit in die heel voorste ry. Soos al die ander is hy in groen geklee en daar is 'n iesegrimmige glimlaggie op sy gesig.

"Hier kom die Griffindors!" gil Lee Jordaan wat soos gewoonlik as kommentator optree. "Potter, Bell, Johnson, Spinnet, Weasley, Weasley en Wood. Alombekend as die beste kant wat Hogwarts in baie jare gehad het –"

Lee se kommentaar word verdrink deur 'n luide geboe van Slibberin se kant van die veld af.

"En hier kom die Slibberinspan gelei deur kaptein Flint. Hy het 'n paar

veranderings aan sy span gemaak en dit lyk of hy gewig bo vaardigheid verkies het."

Nog 'n geboe kom van die Slibberins af: Harry dink egter dat Lee 'n punt het. Malfoy is verreweg die kleinste persoon in Slibberin se span; die res van hulle is enorm groot.

"Kapteins, skud hande!" sê Madame Hooch.

Flint en Wood stap nader en gryp mekaar se hande baie styf vas; dit lyk asof die een probeer om die ander een se vingers te breek.

"Op julle besems!" sê Madame Hooch. "Drie . . . twee . . . een . . ."

Die geluid van haar fluitjie raak verlore so brul die skare toe veertien besems die lug in skiet. Harry voel hoe sy hare van sy voorkop af weggevee word; hy vergeet skoon van sy senuwees so opgewonde is hy; hy kyk om en sien dat Malfoy op sy stert lê, en hy trek met 'n spoed weg op soek na die Snip.

"Dit is Griffindor in besit, Alicia Spinnet van Griffindor met die Swelger wat reguit op Slibberin se doelpale afpyl, baie mooi, Alicia! Agge nee – Swelger onderskep deur Warrington, Warrington van Slibberin jaag teen die kant van die veld op – BOEM! – uitstekende Mokerwerk daar deur George Weasley, Warrington verloor die Swelger, dit word gevang deur – Johnson, Griffindor weer in besit, komaan, Angelina – mooi swenkslag om Montague – *koes, Angelina, daar's 'n Moker!* – SY HET HOM! TIEN–NUL VIR GRIFFINDOR!"

Angelina slaan 'n paar houe in die lug toe sy om die kant van die veld vlieg; die see van skarlaken onder haar skreeu van opwinding –

"EINA!"

Angelina word amper van haar besem afgestamp toe Marcus Flint in haar vasvlieg.

"Jammer!" sê Flint terwyl die skare hom uitjou. "Jammer, het jou nie gesien nie!"

Die volgende oomblik gooi Fred Weasley sy Mokerkolf teen die agterkant van Flint se kop. Flint se neus tref sy besem se steel en raak aan die bloei.

"Dis genoeg!" gil Madame Hooch terwyl sy tussen hulle invlieg. "Strafdoel aan Griffindor vir 'n moedswillige aanval op hul Jaer! Strafdoel aan Slibberin vir 'n doelbewuste aanval op hul Jaer!"

"Ag nee, juffrou!" kerm Fred, maar Madame Hooch blaas haar fluitjie en Alicia vlieg nader om die strafdoel waar te neem.

"Komaan, Alicia!" gil Lee deur die stilte wat oor die skare toegesak het. "JIS! SY'S VERBY DIE WAGTER! TWINTIG–NUL VIR GRIFFINDOR!"

Harry draai die Vuurslag skerp weg om te kyk hoe Flint, wat nog steeds vryelik bloei, nader vlieg om Slibberin se strafdoel waar te neem. Wood hang voor Griffindor se doelpale. Sy kake is styf op mekaar geklem.

"Wood is natuurlik 'n uitstekende Wagter!" lig Lee Jordaan die skare

in, terwyl Flint op Madame Hooch se fluitjie wag. "Uitstekend! Baie moeilike aangee – inderdaad baie moeilik – JIS! EK GLO DIT NIE! HY'T DIT AFGEWEER!"

Harry vlieg verlig weg om die Snip te gaan soek terwyl hy die hele tyd seker maak dat hy elke woord van Lee se kommentaar hoor. Dit is noodsaaklik dat hy Malfoy van die Snip af weghou tot Griffindor met meer as vyftig punte voorloop . . .

"Griffindor in besit, nee, Slibberin in besit – nee! – Griffindor weer in besit en dis Katie Bell van Griffindor met die Swelger, sy laat vat oor die veld – DIT WAS MET OPSET!"

Montague, een van Slibberin se Jaers, het voor Katie ingevlieg en haar kop, in stede van die Swelger, vasgegryp. Katie tol deur die lug, slaag daarin om op haar besem te bly, maar laat die Swelger val.

Madame Hooch se fluitjie klink skril op en sy seil deur die lug na Montague toe terwyl sy op hom skree. 'n Paar oomblikke later slaag Katie daarin om nog 'n doel verby Slibberin se Wagter te stuur.

"DERTIG-NUL! VAT SO, JULLE VIESLIKE SPUL SKELM –"

"Jordaan, as jy nie onpartydige kommentaar kan lewer nie –!"

"Ek sê net wat ek sien, professor!"

Harry voel hoe die opwinding deur hom skiet. Hy het die Snip gesien – dit het aan die voet van Griffindor se doelpale geskitter – maar hy kan dit nie nou al vang nie. En as Malfoy dit moet sien . . .

Harry maak of hy intens op iets fokus, swaai sy Vuurslag om en laat vat na Slibberin se kant van die veld. Dit werk. Malfoy sit hom oop en toe agterna, duidelik met die verwagting dat Harry die Snip daar iewers gesien het.

BOESJ.

Een van die Mokkers maak 'n streep verby Harry se regteroor en tref vir Derrick, Slibberin se reusagtige Breker. Die volgende oomblik –

BOESJ.

Die tweede Moker gaan skrams verby Harry se elmboog. Buys, die ander Breker, kom vinnig nader gevlieg.

Vir 'n vlietende oomblik sien Harry hoe Buys en Derrick met hul kolwe in die lug op hom afpyl –

Op die laaste oomblik stuur hy die Vuurslag opwaarts die lug in en met 'n nare kraakgeluid bots Buys en Derrick kop aan kop teen mekaar.

"Ha, haaa!" gil Lee Jordaan toe Slibberin se Brekers van mekaar af wegsteier met hul koppe in hul hande. "Jul verdiende loon, boeties! Julle sal vroeër moet opstaan as julle 'n Vuurslag wil vang! Dis weer Griffindor in besit, met Johnson in beheer van die Swelger. – Flint is langs haar – steek jou vinger in sy oog, Angelina! – net 'n grappie, professor – agge nee – Flint in besit, Flint pyl op die Griffindordoelpale af, komaan, Wood, red –!"

Maar Flint het punte aangeteken; daar is 'n uitbarsting van luide toejuiging vanaf Slibberin se kant en Lee vloek so erg dat professor McGonagall probeer om die magiese megafoon van hom af weg te vat.

“Jammer, professor, jammer! Sal nie weer gebeur nie! Griffindor loop nog steeds voor met dertig punte teen tien en Griffindor is in besit –”

Dit word die vuilste wedstryd waarin Harry nog ooit gespeel het. Die Slibberins is briesend van woede omdat die Griffindors so vroeg reeds die voortou geneem het en maak van enige taktiek gebruik om die Swelger in die hande te kry. Buys slaan vir Alicia met sy kolf en probeer sê dat hy haar vir 'n Swelger aangesien het. George Weasley stamp vir Buys uit weerwraak met sy elmboog deur die gesig. Madame Hooch ken aan albei spanne strafdoele toe en Wood slaag weer eens daarin om die situasie op hoogs aanskoulike wyse te red sodat die telling veertig-tien in Griffindor se guns is.

Die Snip het weer verdwyn. Malfoy bly nog steeds op Harry se hakke daar waar hy hoog bo die spelers sweef op soek na die Snip – sodra Griffindor vyftig punte voor is.

Katie kry 'n doel. Vyftig-tien. Fred en George Weasley vlieg al om haar, met hul kolwe hoog in die lug, ingeval een van die Slibberins dit dalk oorweeg om wraak te neem. Buys en Derrick sien hul kans en maak gebruik van Fred en George se afwesigheid om albei Mokers op Wood af te stuur; hulle tref hom die een na die ander in die maag sodat hy in die lug omrol. Hy is heeltemal winduit, maar het gelukkig nie sy greep op sy besem verloor nie.

Madame Hooch is buite haarself van woede.

“*n Mens val nie die Wagter aan as die Swelger nie naby die doelpale is nie!*” gil sy op Buys en Derrick. “Strafdoel vir Griffindor!”

Angelina slaag met 'n doel. Sestig-tien. Oomblikke later stuur Fred Weasley 'n Moker op Warrington af wat die Swelger uit sy hande slaan; Alicia vang dit en stuur dit deur Slibberin se doelpale: sewentig-tien.

Griffindor se ondersteuners is besig om hulself hees te skreeu – Griffindor loop met sestig punte voor en as Harry die Snip nou moet vang, dan is die Beker hulle s'n. Harry kan amper voel hoe honderde oë hom volg daar waar hy om die veld vlieg, hoog bo die res van die spelers en met Malfoy op sy hakke.

Toe sien hy dit. So tien meter bo hom, skitter . . . die Snip.

Harry versnel, die wind raas in sy ore; hy steek sy hand uit, maar die Vuurslag verloor spoed –

Verskrik kyk hy om. Malfoy het homself ver vooroor gegooi, die Vuurslag se stert vasgegryp en is besig om dit terug te hou.

“Jou –”

Harry is kwaad genoeg om Malfoy te wil slaan; hy kan net nie bykom nie. Malfoy snak na asem van die inspanning om die Vuurslag terug te

hou, maar sy oë glinster venynig. Hy het geslaag in dit wat hy wou doen – die Snip het weer eens verdwyn.

“Strafdoel! Strafdoel aan Griffindor! Ek het nog nooit sulke taktiek gesien nie!” gil Madame Hooch terwyl sy opskiet na waar Malfoy besig is om op sy Nimbus Tweeduisend-en-een reg te skuif.

“JULLE GEMENE SPUL SKUIM!” skree Lee Jordaan in die megafoon terwyl hy buite bereik van professor McGonagall ronddans. “JULLE VIESLIKE, SKELM BLIK–”

Professor McGonagall raas egter nie met hom nie. Sy wys sowaar vir Malfoy vuus; haar hoed het afgeval en sy skreeu van woede.

Alicia neem Griffindor se strafdoel waar, maar sy is so kwaad dat dit ver mis is. Die Griffindorspan is besig om konsentrasie te verloor en die Slibberins, opgekikker deur Malfoy se vuilspel, is tot groter hoogtes aangespoor.

“Slibberin in besit, Slibberin op pad vir ’n doel – Montague het dit –” kreun Lee. “Sewentig-twintig vir Griffindor . . .”

Harry hou nou vir Malfoy so fyn dop dat hul knieë gedurig teen mekaar stamp. Harry gaan nie toelaat dat Malfoy hoegenaamd binne bereik van die Snip kom nie.

“Gee pad, Potter!” gil Malfoy gefrustreerd toe hy wil uitswaai en vind dat Harry in sy pad is.

“Angelina Johnson van Griffindor in besit van die Swelger, komaan, Angelina, KOMAAN!”

Harry kyk om hom rond. Elke enkele Slibberinspeler, tot Slibberin se Wagter, jaag oor die veld op Angelina af, net Malfoy nie. Hulle gaan probeer om haar pad te blokkeer –

Harry draai die Vuurslag om, buig so laag as wat hy kan oor die steel en por dit aan. Soos ’n koeël uit ’n geweer stuur hy op die Slibberins af.

“AAAAARG!”

Toe die Vuurslag op hulle afstorm, spat hulle uitmekaar; Angelina se pad is oop.

“SY HET DIT! SY HET DIT! Griffindor loop voor met tagtig punte teen twintig!”

Harry, wat amper halsoorkop in die pawiljoen vasgevlieg het, kom glygly tot stilstand, swaai om en skiet terug na die middel van die veld.

Toe sien hy iets wat sy hart laat gaan staan. Malfoy is aan die duik, met ’n uitdrukking van triomf op sy gesig, en daar, ’n paar tree bo die grond, is ’n klein, goue glans net-net sigbaar.

Harry stuur die Vuurslag grondwaarts, maar Malfoy is myle voor hom.

“Nou! Nou! Nou!” por Harry sy besem aan. Hulle haal vir Malfoy in.

Toe Buys ’n Moker op hom afstuur, smeer Harry homself plat teen sy besem se steel . . . hy is op Malfoy se hakke . . . hy trek gelyk met hom –

Harry gooi homself vorentoe en los die steel met albei hande. Hy slaan Malfoy se hand weg en –

"JIS!"

Toe hy met sy hand in die lug uit die duikslag breek, is dit asof die hele pawiljoen ontplof. Harry vlieg hoog bo die skare. Daar is 'n vreemde suising in sy ore. Die klein, goue balletjie wat hy styf in sy vuus vashou, klap sy vlerkies hulpeloos teen sy vingers.

Dan storm Wood op hom af, halfverblind deur die trane; hy gryp vir Harry om sy nek en snik onkeerbaar teen sy skouer. Harry voel twee harde stampe toe Fred en George in hulle vasvlieg; toe hoor hy Angelina, Alicia en Katie se stemme, "*Ons het die Beker! Ons het die Beker!*" Saamgebondel in 'n omhelsing van dosyne arms, sink die Griffindorspan wat die hele tyd hees skree aarde toe.

Ondersteuners in rooi storm in vlae oor die versperrings tot op die veld. Hande reën op die spanlede se rûe. Harry het 'n benewelde indruk van geraas en lywe wat teen hom druk. Toe word hy en die res van die span op die skare se skouers gehys. Van hier af kan hy vir Hagrid wat oortrek is met rooi rosette, duidelik sien – "Jy't hulle goed opgedons, Harry, jy't hulle goed opgedons! Wag tot ek vir Bokbok vertel!" Daar is Percy wat, alle waardigheid vergete, soos 'n mal mens op en af spring. Professor McGonagall, wat harder as Wood huil, vee haar oë aan 'n tamaai Griffindorvlag af en Ron en Hermien veg 'n pad oop na Harry toe. Hulle is sprakeloos. Hulle straal van vreugde terwyl Harry na die verhoog gedra word waar Dompeldorius met die yslike Kwiddiekbeker staan en wag.

As daar net iewers 'n Dementor was . . . Toe 'n snikkende Wood die Beker vir Harry aangee, voel dit vir hom asof hy die wêreld se beste Patronus sal kan optower.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN



PROFESSOR TRELAWNEY'S PREDICTION

Harry's euphoria at finally winning the Quidditch Cup lasted at least a week. Even the weather seemed to be celebrating; as June approached, the days became cloudless and sultry, and all anybody felt like doing was strolling onto the grounds and flopping down on the grass with several pints of iced pumpkin juice, perhaps playing a casual game of Gobstones or watching the giant squid propel itself dreamily across the surface of the lake.

But they couldn't. Exams were nearly upon them, and instead of lazing around outside, the students were forced to remain inside the castle, trying to bully their brains into concentrating while enticing

wafts of summer air drifted in through the windows. Even Fred and George Weasley had been spotted working; they were about to take their O.W.L.s (Ordinary Wizarding Levels). Percy was getting ready to take his N.E.W.T.s (Nastily Exhausting Wizarding Tests), the highest qualification Hogwarts offered. As Percy hoped to enter the Ministry of Magic, he needed top grades. He was becoming increasingly edgy, and gave very severe punishments to anybody who disturbed the quiet of the common room in the evenings. In fact, the only person who seemed more anxious than Percy was Hermione.

Harry and Ron had given up asking her how she was managing to attend several classes at once, but they couldn't restrain themselves when they saw the exam schedule she had drawn up for herself. The first column read:

Monday

9 o'clock, Arithmancy

9 o'clock, Transfiguration

Lunch

1 o'clock, Charms

1 o'clock, Ancient Runes

"Hermione?" Ron said cautiously, because she was liable to explode when interrupted these days. "Er — are you sure you've copied down these times right?"

"What?" snapped Hermione, picking up the exam schedule and examining it. "Yes, of course I have."

"Is there any point asking how you're going to sit for two exams at once?" said Harry.

“No,” said Hermione shortly. “Have either of you seen my copy of *Numerology and Grammatica*?”

“Oh, yeah, I borrowed it for a bit of bedtime reading,” said Ron, but very quietly. Hermione started shifting heaps of parchment around on her table, looking for the book. Just then, there was a rustle at the window and Hedwig fluttered through it, a note clutched tight in her beak.

“It’s from Hagrid,” said Harry, ripping the note open. “Buckbeak’s appeal — it’s set for the sixth.”

“That’s the day we finish our exams,” said Hermione, still looking everywhere for her Arithmancy book.

“And they’re coming up here to do it,” said Harry, still reading from the letter. “Someone from the Ministry of Magic and — and an executioner.”

Hermione looked up, startled.

“They’re bringing the executioner to the appeal! But that sounds as though they’ve already decided!”

“Yeah, it does,” said Harry slowly.

“They can’t!” Ron howled. “I’ve spent *ages* reading up on stuff for him; they can’t just ignore it all!”

But Harry had a horrible feeling that the Committee for the Disposal of Dangerous Creatures had had its mind made up for it by Mr. Malfoy. Draco, who had been noticeably subdued since Gryffindor’s triumph in the Quidditch final, seemed to regain some of his old swagger over the next few days. From sneering comments Harry overheard, Malfoy was certain Buckbeak was going to be killed, and seemed thoroughly pleased with himself for bringing it

about. It was all Harry could do to stop himself imitating Hermione and hitting Malfoy in the face on these occasions. And the worst thing of all was that they had no time or opportunity to go and see Hagrid, because the strict new security measures had not been lifted, and Harry didn't dare retrieve his Invisibility Cloak from below the one-eyed witch.

Exam week began and an unnatural hush fell over the castle. The third years emerged from Transfiguration at lunchtime on Monday, limp and ashen-faced, comparing results and bemoaning the difficulty of the tasks they had been set, which had included turning a teapot into a tortoise. Hermione irritated the rest by fussing about how her tortoise had looked more like a turtle, which was the least of everyone else's worries.

"Mine still had a spout for a tail, what a nightmare. . . ."

"Were the tortoises *supposed* to breathe steam?"

"It still had a willow-patterned shell, d'you think that'll count against me?"

Then, after a hasty lunch, it was straight back upstairs for the Charms exam. Hermione had been right; Professor Flitwick did indeed test them on Cheering Charms. Harry slightly overdid his out of nerves and Ron, who was partnering him, ended up in fits of hysterical laughter and had to be led away to a quiet room for an hour before he was ready to perform the charm himself. After dinner, the students hurried back to their common rooms, not to relax, but to start studying for Care of Magical Creatures, Potions, and Astronomy.

Hagrid presided over the Care of Magical Creatures exam the

following morning with a very preoccupied air indeed; his heart didn't seem to be in it at all. He had provided a large tub of fresh flobberworms for the class, and told them that to pass the test, their flobberworm had to still be alive at the end of one hour. As flobberworms flourished best if left to their own devices, it was the easiest exam any of them had ever taken, and also gave Harry, Ron, and Hermione plenty of opportunity to speak to Hagrid.

"Beaky's gettin' a bit depressed," Hagrid told them, bending low on the pretense of checking that Harry's flobberworm was still alive. "Bin cooped up too long. But still . . . we'll know day after tomorrow — one way or the other —"

They had Potions that afternoon, which was an unqualified disaster. Try as Harry might, he couldn't get his Confusing Concoction to thicken, and Snape, standing watch with an air of vindictive pleasure, scribbled something that looked suspiciously like a zero onto his notes before moving away.

Then came Astronomy at midnight, up on the tallest tower; History of Magic on Wednesday morning, in which Harry scribbled everything Florean Fortescue had ever told him about medieval witch-hunts, while wishing he could have had one of Fortescue's choco-nut sundaes with him in the stifling classroom. Wednesday afternoon meant Herbology, in the greenhouses under a baking-hot sun; then back to the common room once more, with sunburnt necks, thinking longingly of this time next day, when it would all be over.

Their second to last exam, on Thursday morning, was Defense Against the Dark Arts. Professor Lupin had compiled the most unusual exam any of them had ever taken: a sort of obstacle course

outside in the sun, where they had to wade across a deep paddling pool containing a grindylow, cross a series of potholes full of Red Caps, squish their way across a patch of marsh while ignoring misleading directions from a hinkypunk, then climb into an old trunk and battle with a new boggart.

“Excellent, Harry,” Lupin muttered as Harry climbed out of the trunk, grinning. “Full marks.”

Flushed with his success, Harry hung around to watch Ron and Hermione. Ron did very well until he reached the hinkypunk, which successfully confused him into sinking waist-high into the quagmire. Hermione did everything perfectly until she reached the trunk with the boggart in it. After about a minute inside it, she burst out again, screaming.

“Hermione!” said Lupin, startled. “What’s the matter?”

“P-P-Professor McGonagall!” Hermione gasped, pointing into the trunk. “Sh-she said I’d failed everything!”

It took a little while to calm Hermione down. When at last she had regained a grip on herself, she, Harry, and Ron went back to the castle. Ron was still slightly inclined to laugh at Hermione’s boggart, but an argument was averted by the sight that met them on the top of the steps.

Cornelius Fudge, sweating slightly in his pinstriped cloak, was standing there staring out at the grounds. He started at the sight of Harry.

“Hello there, Harry!” he said. “Just had an exam, I expect? Nearly finished?”

“Yes,” said Harry. Hermione and Ron, not being on speaking terms

with the Minister of Magic, hovered awkwardly in the background.

“Lovely day,” said Fudge, casting an eye over the lake. “Pity . . . pity . . .”

He sighed deeply and looked down at Harry.

“I’m here on an unpleasant mission, Harry. The Committee for the Disposal of Dangerous Creatures required a witness to the execution of a mad hippogriff. As I needed to visit Hogwarts to check on the Black situation, I was asked to step in.”

“Does that mean the appeal’s already happened?” Ron interrupted, stepping forward.

“No, no, it’s scheduled for this afternoon,” said Fudge, looking curiously at Ron.

“Then you might not have to witness an execution at all!” said Ron stoutly. “The hippogriff might get off!”

Before Fudge could answer, two wizards came through the castle doors behind him. One was so ancient he appeared to be withering before their very eyes; the other was tall and strapping, with a thin black mustache. Harry gathered that they were representatives of the Committee for the Disposal of Dangerous Creatures, because the very old wizard squinted toward Hagrid’s cabin and said in a feeble voice, “Dear, dear, I’m getting too old for this. . . . Two o’clock, isn’t it, Fudge?”

The black-mustached man was fingering something in his belt; Harry looked and saw that he was running one broad thumb along the blade of a shining axe. Ron opened his mouth to say something, but Hermione nudged him hard in the ribs and jerked her head toward the entrance hall.

“Why’d you stop me?” said Ron angrily as they entered the Great Hall for lunch. “Did you see them? They’ve even got the axe ready! This isn’t justice!”

“Ron, your dad works for the Ministry, you can’t go saying things like that to his boss!” said Hermione, but she too looked very upset. “As long as Hagrid keeps his head this time, and argues his case properly, they can’t possibly execute Buckbeak. . . .”

But Harry could tell Hermione didn’t really believe what she was saying. All around them, people were talking excitedly as they ate their lunch, happily anticipating the end of the exams that afternoon, but Harry, Ron, and Hermione, lost in worry about Hagrid and Buckbeak, didn’t join in.

Harry’s and Ron’s last exam was Divination; Hermione’s, Muggle Studies. They walked up the marble staircase together; Hermione left them on the first floor and Harry and Ron proceeded all the way up to the seventh, where many of their class were sitting on the spiral staircase to Professor Trelawney’s classroom, trying to cram in a bit of last-minute studying.

“She’s seeing us all separately,” Neville informed them as they went to sit down next to him. He had his copy of *Unfogging the Future* open on his lap at the pages devoted to crystal gazing. “Have either of you ever seen *anything* in a crystal ball?” he asked them unhappily.

“Nope,” said Ron in an offhand voice. He kept checking his watch; Harry knew that he was counting down the time until Buckbeak’s appeal started.

The line of people outside the classroom shortened very slowly.

As each person climbed back down the silver ladder, the rest of the class hissed, "What did she ask? Was it okay?"

But they all refused to say.

"She says the crystal ball's told her that if I tell you, I'll have a horrible accident!" squeaked Neville as he clambered back down the ladder toward Harry and Ron, who had now reached the landing.

"That's convenient," snorted Ron. "You know, I'm starting to think Hermione was right about her" — he jabbed his thumb toward the trapdoor overhead — "she's a right old fraud."

"Yeah," said Harry, looking at his own watch. It was now two o'clock. "Wish she'd hurry up . . ."

Parvati came back down the ladder glowing with pride.

"She says I've got all the makings of a true Seer," she informed Harry and Ron. "I saw *loads* of stuff. . . . Well, good luck!"

She hurried off down the spiral staircase toward Lavender.

"Ronald Weasley," said the familiar, misty voice from over their heads. Ron grimaced at Harry and climbed the silver ladder out of sight. Harry was now the only person left to be tested. He settled himself on the floor with his back against the wall, listening to a fly buzzing in the sunny window, his mind across the grounds with Hagrid.

Finally, after about twenty minutes, Ron's large feet reappeared on the ladder.

"How'd it go?" Harry asked him, standing up.

"Rubbish," said Ron. "Couldn't see a thing, so I made some stuff up. Don't think she was convinced, though. . . ."

"Meet you in the common room," Harry muttered as Professor

Trelawney's voice called, "Harry Potter!"

The tower room was hotter than ever before; the curtains were closed; the fire was alight, and the usual sickly scent made Harry cough as he stumbled through the clutter of chairs and tables to where Professor Trelawney sat waiting for him before a large crystal ball.

"Good day, my dear," she said softly. "If you would kindly gaze into the Orb. . . . Take your time, now . . . then tell me what you see within it. . . ."

Harry bent over the crystal ball and stared, stared as hard as he could, willing it to show him something other than swirling white fog, but nothing happened.

"Well?" Professor Trelawney prompted delicately. "What do you see?"

The heat was overpowering and his nostrils were stinging with the perfumed smoke wafting from the fire beside them. He thought of what Ron had just said, and decided to pretend.

"Er —" said Harry, "a dark shape . . . um . . ."

"What does it resemble?" whispered Professor Trelawney. "Think, now . . ."

Harry cast his mind around and it landed on Buckbeak.

"A hippogriff," he said firmly.

"Indeed!" whispered Professor Trelawney, scribbling keenly on the parchment perched upon her knees. "My boy, you may well be seeing the outcome of poor Hagrid's trouble with the Ministry of Magic! Look closer. . . . Does the hippogriff appear to . . . have its head?"

"Yes," said Harry firmly.

“Are you sure?” Professor Trelawney urged him. “Are you quite sure, dear? You don’t see it writhing on the ground, perhaps, and a shadowy figure raising an axe behind it?”

“No!” said Harry, starting to feel slightly sick.

“No blood? No weeping Hagrid?”

“No!” said Harry again, wanting more than ever to leave the room and the heat. “It looks fine, it’s — flying away. . . .”

Professor Trelawney sighed.

“Well, dear, I think we’ll leave it there. . . . A little disappointing . . . but I’m sure you did your best.”

Relieved, Harry got up, picked up his bag and turned to go, but then a loud, harsh voice spoke behind him.

“IT WILL HAPPEN TONIGHT.”

Harry wheeled around. Professor Trelawney had gone rigid in her armchair; her eyes were unfocused and her mouth sagging.

“S-sorry?” said Harry.

But Professor Trelawney didn’t seem to hear him. Her eyes started to roll. Harry stood there in a panic. She looked as though she was about to have some sort of seizure. He hesitated, thinking of running to the hospital wing — and then Professor Trelawney spoke again, in the same harsh voice, quite unlike her own:

“THE DARK LORD LIES ALONE AND FRIENDLESS, ABANDONED BY HIS FOLLOWERS. HIS SERVANT HAS BEEN CHAINED THESE TWELVE YEARS. TONIGHT, BEFORE MIDNIGHT . . . THE SERVANT WILL BREAK FREE AND SET OUT TO REJOIN HIS MASTER. THE DARK LORD WILL RISE AGAIN WITH HIS SERVANT’S AID, GREATER AND MORE TERRIBLE THAN EVER BEFORE.”

TONIGHT . . . BEFORE MIDNIGHT . . . THE SERVANT . . . WILL SET OUT . . . TO
REJOIN . . . HIS MASTER. . . .”

Professor Trelawney’s head fell forward onto her chest. She made a grunting sort of noise. Then, quite suddenly, Professor Trelawney’s head snapped up again.

“I’m so sorry, dear boy,” she said dreamily, “the heat of the day, you know . . . I drifted off for a moment. . . .”

Harry stood there, still staring.

“Is there anything wrong, my dear?”

“You — you just told me that the — the Dark Lord’s going to rise again . . . that his servant’s going to go back to him”

Professor Trelawney looked thoroughly startled.

“The Dark Lord? He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named? My dear boy, that’s hardly something to joke about. . . . Rise again, indeed —”

“But you just said it! You said the Dark Lord —”

“I think you must have dozed off too, dear!” said Professor Trelawney. “I would certainly not presume to predict anything quite as far-fetched as *that!*”

Harry climbed back down the ladder and the spiral staircase, wondering . . . had he just heard Professor Trelawney make a real prediction? Or had that been her idea of an impressive end to the test?

Five minutes later he was dashing past the security trolls outside the entrance to Gryffindor Tower, Professor Trelawney’s words still resounding in his head. People were striding past him in the opposite direction, laughing and joking, heading for the grounds and a bit of long-awaited freedom; by the time he had reached the portrait hole

and entered the common room; it was almost deserted. Over in the corner, however, sat Ron and Hermione.

“Professor Trelawney,” Harry panted, “just told me —”

But he stopped abruptly at the sight of their faces.

“Buckbeak lost,” said Ron weakly. “Hagrid’s just sent this.”

Hagrid’s note was dry this time, no tears had splattered it, yet his hand seemed to have shaken so much as he wrote that it was hardly legible.

Lost appeal. They're going to execute at sunset. Nothing you can do. Don't come down. I don't want you to see it.

Hagrid

“We’ve got to go,” said Harry at once. “He can’t just sit there on his own, waiting for the executioner!”

“Sunset, though,” said Ron, who was staring out the window in a glazed sort of way. “We’d never be allowed . . . specially you, Harry. . . .”

Harry sank his head into his hands, thinking.

“If we only had the Invisibility Cloak. . . .”

“Where is it?” said Hermione.

Harry told her about leaving it in the passageway under the one-eyed witch.

“ . . . if Snape sees me anywhere near there again, I’m in serious trouble,” he finished.

“That’s true,” said Hermione, getting to her feet. “If he sees *you*. . . . How do you open the witch’s hump again?”

“You — you tap it and say, ‘*Dissendium*,’” said Harry. “But —”

Hermione didn’t wait for the rest of his sentence; she strode across the room, pushed open the Fat Lady’s portrait and vanished from sight.

“She hasn’t gone to get it?” Ron said, staring after her.

She had! Hermione returned a quarter of an hour later with the silvery Cloak folded carefully under her robes.

“Hermione, I don’t know what’s gotten into you lately!” said Ron, astounded. “First you hit Malfoy, then you walk out on Professor Trelawney —”

Hermione looked rather flattered.

They went down to dinner with everybody else, but did not return to Gryffindor Tower afterward. Harry had the Cloak hidden down the front of his robes; he had to keep his arms folded to hide the lump. They skulked in an empty chamber off the entrance hall, listening, until they were sure it was deserted. They heard a last pair of people hurrying across the hall and a door slamming. Hermione poked her head around the door.

“Okay,” she whispered, “no one there — Cloak on —”

Walking very close together so that nobody would see them, they crossed the hall on tiptoe beneath the Cloak, then walked down the stone front steps into the grounds. The sun was already sinking behind the Forbidden Forest, gilding the top branches of the trees.

They reached Hagrid’s cabin and knocked. He was a minute in answering, and when he did, he looked all around for his visitor, pale-faced and trembling.

"It's us," Harry hissed. "We're wearing the Invisibility Cloak. Let us in and we can take it off."

"Yeh shouldn't ve come!" Hagrid whispered, but he stood back, and they stepped inside. Hagrid shut the door quickly and Harry pulled off the Cloak.

Hagrid was not crying, nor did he throw himself upon their necks. He looked like a man who did not know where he was or what to do. This helplessness was worse to watch than tears.

"Wan' some tea?" he said. His great hands were shaking as he reached for the kettle.

"Where's Buckbeak, Hagrid?" said Hermione hesitantly.

"I — I took him outside," said Hagrid, spilling milk all over the table as he filled up the jug. "He's tethered in me pumpkin patch. Thought he oughta see the trees an' — an' smell fresh air — before —"

Hagrid's hand trembled so violently that the milk jug slipped from his grasp and shattered all over the floor.

"I'll do it, Hagrid," said Hermione quickly, hurrying over and starting to clean up the mess.

"There's another one in the cupboard," Hagrid said, sitting down and wiping his forehead on his sleeve. Harry glanced at Ron, who looked back hopelessly.

"Isn't there anything anyone can do, Hagrid?" Harry asked fiercely, sitting down next to him. "Dumbledore —"

"He's tried," said Hagrid. "He's got no power ter overrule the Committee. He told 'em Buckbeak's all right, but they're scared. Yeh know what Lucius Malfoy's like . . . threatened 'em, I expect . . ."

an' the executioner, Macnair, he's an old pal o' Malfoy's . . . but it'll be quick an' clean . . . an' I'll be beside him. . . .”

Hagrid swallowed. His eyes were darting all over the cabin as though looking for some shred of hope or comfort.

“Dumbledore’s gonna come down while it — while it happens. Wrote me this mornin’. Said he wants ter — ter be with me. Great man, Dumbledore. . . .”

Hermione, who had been rummaging in Hagrid’s cupboard for another milk jug, let out a small, quickly stifled sob. She straightened up with the new jug in her hands, fighting back tears.

“We’ll stay with you too, Hagrid,” she began, but Hagrid shook his shaggy head.

“Yeh’re ter go back up ter the castle. I told yeh, I don’ wan’ yeh watchin’. An’ yeh shouldn’ be down here anyway. . . . If Fudge an’ Dumbledore catch yeh out without permission, Harry, yeh’ll be in big trouble.”

Silent tears were now streaming down Hermione’s face, but she hid them from Hagrid, bustling around making tea. Then, as she picked up the milk bottle to pour some into the jug, she let out a shriek.

“Ron! I — I don’t believe it — it’s *Scabbers*!”

Ron gaped at her.

“What are you talking about?”

Hermione carried the milk jug over to the table and turned it upside down. With a frantic squeak, and much scrambling to get back inside, Scabbers the rat came sliding out onto the table.

“Scabbers!” said Ron blankly. “Scabbers, what are you doing

here?"

He grabbed the struggling rat and held him up to the light. Scabbers looked dreadful. He was thinner than ever; large tufts of hair had fallen out, leaving wide bald patches, and he writhed in Ron's hands as though desperate to free himself.

"It's okay, Scabbers!" said Ron. "No cats! There's nothing here to hurt you!"

Hagrid suddenly stood up, his eyes fixed on the window. His normally ruddy face had gone the color of parchment.

"They're comin'"

Harry, Ron, and Hermione whipped around. A group of men was walking down the distant castle steps. In front was Albus Dumbledore, his silver beard gleaming in the dying sun. Next to him trotted Cornelius Fudge. Behind them came the feeble old Committee member and the executioner, Macnair.

"Yeh gotta go," said Hagrid. Every inch of him was trembling. "They mustn' find yeh here. . . . Go now. . . ."

Ron stuffed Scabbers into his pocket and Hermione picked up the Cloak.

"I'll let yeh out the back way," said Hagrid.

They followed him to the door into his back garden. Harry felt strangely unreal, and even more so when he saw Buckbeak a few yards away, tethered to a tree behind Hagrid's pumpkin patch. Buckbeak seemed to know something was happening. He turned his sharp head from side to side and pawed the ground nervously.

"It's okay, Beaky," said Hagrid softly. "It's okay" He turned to Harry, Ron, and Hermione. "Go on," he said. "Get goin'."

But they didn't move.

"Hagrid, we can't —"

"We'll tell them what really happened —"

"They can't kill him —"

"Go!" said Hagrid fiercely. "It's bad enough without you lot in trouble an' all!"

They had no choice. As Hermione threw the Cloak over Harry and Ron, they heard voices at the front of the cabin. Hagrid looked at the place where they had just vanished from sight.

"Go quick," he said hoarsely. "Don't listen. . . ."

And he strode back into his cabin as someone knocked at the front door.

Slowly, in a kind of horrified trance, Harry, Ron, and Hermione set off silently around Hagrid's house. As they reached the other side, the front door closed with a sharp snap.

"Please, let's hurry," Hermione whispered. "I can't stand it, I can't bear it. . . ."

They started up the sloping lawn toward the castle. The sun was sinking fast now; the sky had turned to a clear, purple-tinged gray, but to the west there was a ruby-red glow.

Ron stopped dead.

"Oh, please, Ron," Hermione began.

"It's Scabbers — he won't — stay put —"

Ron was bent over, trying to keep Scabbers in his pocket, but the rat was going berserk; squeaking madly, twisting and flailing, trying to sink his teeth into Ron's hand.

“Scabbers, it’s me, you idiot, it’s Ron,” Ron hissed.

They heard a door open behind them and men’s voices.

“Oh, Ron, please let’s move, they’re going to do it!” Hermione breathed.

“Okay — Scabbers, stay *put* —”

They walked forward; Harry, like Hermione, was trying not to listen to the rumble of voices behind them. Ron stopped again.

“I can’t hold him — Scabbers, shut up, everyone’ll hear us —”

The rat was squealing wildly, but not loudly enough to cover up the sounds drifting from Hagrid’s garden. There was a jumble of indistinct male voices, a silence, and then, without warning, the unmistakable swish and thud of an axe.

Hermione swayed on the spot.

“They did it!” she whispered to Harry. “I d-don’t believe it — they did it!”

Professor Trelawney se Voorspelling

Harry se ekstase nadat hulle uiteindelik die Kwiddiekbeker gewen het, duur 'n volle week. Dis of selfs die weer dit vier; hoe nader Junie kom, hoe meer wolkloos en hoe warmer word die dae. Al waarvoor almal lus is, is om op die terrein op die gras te gaan lê met liters yskoue pampoen-sap, om dalk 'n rustige potjie Spoegklippe te speel, of om te kyk hoe die reuse-inkvis dromerig oor die meer swem.

Hulle kan egter nie. Die eksamen is op hande en pleks van buitekant rondlê, moet die studente in die kasteel bly en hul breine dwing om te konsentreer, dit terwyl die somerluggie uitlokkend deur die vensters waai. Tot Fred en George studeer; hulle moet hul UILE skryf (Uitsonderlike Intellektuele Liga). Percy berei homself op sy OTTE voor (Ontsettende Taai Tower-Eksamens), die hoogste kwalifikasie wat Hogwarts aanbied. Aangesien Percy graag eendag by die Ministerie vir Towerkuns wil gaan werk, is dit belangrik dat hy een van die toppresterders moet wees. Hy is besig om al hoe meer op sy senuwees te raak en deel swaar strawwe uit aan diegene wat saans in die geselskamer raas. Om die waarheid te sê, Hermien is die enigste persoon wat benouder as Percy is.

Harry en Ron vra nie meer vir haar hoe sy dit regkry om meer as een klas tegelykertyd by te woon nie, maar toe hulle die eksamenrooster sien wat sy vir haarself opgestel het, kan hulle hulself nie keer nie. Die eerste kolom lyk so:

MAANDAG

9-uur, Rekenmatiek

9-uur, Transfigurasië

Etenstyd

1-uur, Towerspreuke

1-uur, Antieke Runes

"Hermien?" sê Ron versigtig, want sy is die laaste tyd geneig om te ontplof wanneer sy onderbreek word. "H'm – is jy seker jy het hierdie tye reg afgeskryf?"

“Wat?” sê Hermien skerp, terwyl sy haar eksamenrooster optel en daarna kyk. “Ja, natuurlik het ek.”

“Mag ek vra hoe jy dit gaan regkry om twee vraestelle op dieselfde tyd te skryf?” sê Harry.

“Nee,” sê Hermien kortaf. “Het enigiemand my eksemplaar van *Numerologie en Grammatika* gesien?”

“O, ja, ek het dit geleen om saans in die bed te lê en lees,” sê Ron baie saggies. Hermien begin om hope perkament op haar tafel rond te skuif op soek na die boek. Net toe is daar ’n geritsel by die venster en Hedwig fladder in met ’n briefie in haar snawel.

“Dis van Hagrid,” sê Harry en skeur die briefie oop. “Bokbok se appél – dis op die sesde.”

“Dis die laaste dag van ons eksamen,” sê Hermien wat nog steeds hoog en laag na haar Rekenmatiekboek soek.

“En hulle kom hierheen om dit te doen,” sê Harry wat nog nie klaar gelees het nie. “Iemand van die Ministerie vir Towerkuns en – en ’n laksman.”

Hermien kyk geskok op.

“Hulle bring die laksman na die appél toe? Dit klink asof hulle klaar besluit het!”

“Ja, dit klink so,” sê Harry stadig.

“Hulle kan nie!” kerm Ron. “Ek het eeue aan al daardie goed opgelees, hulle kan dit nie alles sommer net ignoreer nie!”

Harry het egter ’n nare voorgevoel dat die Komitee vir die Vernietiging van Gevaarlike Creature se besluit namens hulle deur mnr. Malfoy geneem is. Draco, wat aansienlik stiller was na Griffindor se oorwinning in die Kwiddiek-eindstryd, het die laaste paar dae iets van sy vorige windmaker houding herwin. Van die snedige aanmerkings wat Harry gehoor het, lei hy af dat Malfoy seker is dat Bokbok tereggestel gaan word. Hy lyk ook besonder in sy skik met homself dat hy dit bewerkstellig het. Harry slaag net-net daarin om nie Hermien se voorbeeld te volg en vir Malfoy deur die gesig te klap nie. Die ergste van alles is dat hulle nóg die tyd nog die kans het om vir Hagrid te gaan sien, want die nuwe streng veiligheidsmaatreëls is nog nie opgehef nie en Harry kan dit nie waag om sy onsigbaarheidsmantel uit die tunnel onder die eenoogheks te gaan haal nie.

Toe die eksamen begin, sak ’n onnatuurlike stilte oor die kasteel uit. Toe die derdejaars daardie Maandag teen etenstyd uit die Transfigurasië-klas kom, is hulle stokflou en asvaal in die gesig. Hulle vergelyk hul resultate en kla oor die moeilike opdragte soos om ’n teepot in ’n skilpad te verander. Hermien irriteer almal deur ’n ophef te maak oor hoe haar skilpad glo meer soos ’n waterskilpad gelyk het. Dit was die minste van die ander se bekommernisse.

“Myne het 'n tuit vir 'n stert gehad, wat 'n nagmerrie . . .”

“Was die skilpaaie veronderstel om stoom uit te asem?”

“Die ding het nog 'n wilgerpatroon op die dop gehad, dink jy dit gaan teen my tel?”

Toe, na 'n haastige middagete, gaan hulle weer reguit boontoe vir die Towerspreuk-vraestel. Hermien was reg, professor Flickerpitt toets hulle inderdaad oor Opkikker-towerspreuke. Harry is so op sy senuwees dat hy dit ietwat oordryf, en Ron, wat saam met hom werk, gaan histories aan die lag en moet vir 'n uur na 'n stil vertrek gaan voor hy die Towerspreuk self kan probeer doen. Na aandete gaan die studente haastig terug na hul geselskamers, nie om te ontspan nie, maar om Towerdrankies, Versorging van Magiese Kreature en Sterrekunde te hersien.

Die volgende oggend is dit duidelik dat Hagrid, wat die Versorging van Magiese Kreature-vraestel hanteer, in 'n besonder afgetrokke bui is. Dis of sy hart glad nie by die eksamen is nie. Hy het 'n groot bak vol vars Flobberwurms klas toe gebring en sê hulle sal deur wees as hul Flobberwurms na 'n uur nog lewe. Aangesien Flobberwurms gedy as 'n mens hulle net eenvoudig uitlos, is dit die maklikste vraestel wat enigiemand nog ooit geskryf het, en dit gee ook vir Harry, Ron en Hermien oorgenoeg kans om met Hagrid te gesels.

“Bokkie is besig om terneergedruk te word,” sê Hagrid terwyl hy laag buk asof hy probeer kyk of Harry se Flobberwurm nog lewe. “Te lank ingehok. Maar . . . ons sal oormore weet – die uitslag.”

Daardie middag het hulle Towerdrankies, wat 'n volslae ramp is. Dit maak nie saak wat Harry doen nie, sy Verwarringsdrankie weier om dik te word, en Snerp, wat met 'n mengsel van venyn en vermakerigheid staan en kyk, maak iets op sy notaboek wat ontstellend baie soos 'n nul lyk, voor hy verder stap.

Teen middernag is dit Sterrekunde op die hoogste toring; Woensdagoggend volg Geskiedenis van die Towerkuns en Harry skryf alles neer wat Fritz Friesmann vir hom oor Middeleeuse heksejagtery vertel het, terwyl hy na een van Friesmann se sjokolade-en-neut-roomyse hier in hierdie verstikkende klaskamer smag. Woensdagmiddag is dit Herbologie in die blakerende son by die kweekhuise; dan weer terug na die geselskamer waar hulle met rooi gebrande nekke verlangend aan die volgende dag dink wanneer alles oor sal wees.

Op Donderdagoggend is dit hul tweedelaaste vraestel, Verdediging teen die Donker Kunste. Professor Lupin het die mees ongewone vraestel wat enigeen van hulle nog ooit moes beantwoord, saamgestel. Dis 'n soort hindernisren buite in die son waar hulle deur 'n diep poel water waarin 'n Grindeloog skuil, moet loop, verby 'n paar slaggate vol Rooikappies moet gaan, hul pad oor 'n stuk vleigrond moet vind sonder om hulle aan die Hinkepink se misleidende aanwysings te steur, en daarna in

'n ou trommel moet klim om teen 'n vars Boggart te veg.

“Uitstekend, Harry,” mompel Lupin toe Harry grinnikend uit die trommel klim. “Volpunte.”

Harry is dronk van vreugde, en bly agter om te sien wat Ron en Hermien doen. Ron vaar uitstekend tot hy by die Hinkepink kom wat hom so deurmekaar maak dat hy tot aan sy middel in die modderwater weg-sak. Hermien doen alles perfek reg tot sy by die trommel met die Boggart kom. Na skaars 'n minuut bars sy skreeuend daaruit.

“Hermien!” sê Lupin verskrik. “Wat makeer?”

“P-P-Professor McGonagall!” sê Hermien snikkend en wys na die trommel. “S-Sy’t gesê dat ek alles gedop het!”

Dit neem 'n hele rukkie voor Hermien bedaar het. Toe sy uiteindelik weer 'n greep op haarself het, gaan sy, Harry en Ron terug kasteel toe. Ron is nog steeds half lus om oor Hermien se Boggart te lag, maar daar is nie kans om moeilikheid te soek nie, want op die bopunt van die trappe staan iemand.

Dit is Cornelius Broddelwerk, effens natgesweet in sy strepiesmantel, wat oor die terrein staar. Hy skrik toe hy vir Harry sien.

“Hallo daar, Harry!” sê hy. “So pas eksamen geskryf, of wat? Amper klaar?”

“Ja,” sê Harry. Hermien en Ron, wat die Minister vir Towerkuns nie ken nie, huiwer ongemaklik op die agtergrond.

“Pragtige dag,” sê Broddelwerk en tuur oor die meer. “Te jammer tog te jammer . . .”

Hy sug diep en kyk af na Harry.

“Ek is hier op 'n onaangename sending, Harry. Die Komitee vir die Vernietiging van Gevaarlike Creature benodig 'n getuie vir die teregstelling van 'n besete Hippogrief. Siende dat ek na Hogwarts moes kom om te kyk wat met die Swardt-situasie aangaan, is ek gevra om hulle uit te help.”

“Beteeken dit dat die appel reeds verby is?” val Ron hom in die rede.

“Nee, nee, dis vir vanmiddag geskeduleer.”

“Dan gaan u heel waarskynlik glad nie 'n getuie hoef te wees nie!” sê Ron parmantig. “Dalk word die Hippogrief vrygespreek!”

Voor Broddelwerk hom kan antwoord, kom twee towenaars deur die kasteeldeure agter hom. Die een is so oud, dit lyk of hy voor hul oë wegkwyn; die ander een is lank en sterkgebou met 'n dun swart snorretjie. Harry vermoed dat hulle verteenwoordigers van die Komitee vir die Vernietiging van Gevaarlike Creature is, want die ou toenaar loer deur skrefiesoë na Hagrid se hut en sê in 'n yl stemmetjie, “O, my liewe, ek is te oud hiervoor . . . twee-uur of hoe, Broddelwerk?”

Die man met die swart snorretjie trek sy vinger oor iets in sy gordel; Harry kyk en sien hoe een breë duim oor 'n blink byl se lem speel. Ron

maak nog sy mond oop om iets te sê, maar Hermien pomp hom hard in die ribbes en beduie met haar kop na die ingangsportaal.

"Hoekom het jy my gekeer?" vra Ron ergerlik toe hulle by die Groot Saal instap vir middagete. "Het jy mooi na hulle gekyk? Hulle het tot al die byl reg! Dit is nie geregtigheid nie!"

"Ron, jou pa werk vir die Ministerie. Jy kan nie sulke goed vir sy baas sê nie!" sê Hermien, maar ook sy lyk baie ontsteld. "As Hagrid net hierdie keer kophou en sy saak behoorlik stel, dan kan hulle onmoontlik vir Bokbok teregstel."

Harry kan egter sien dat Hermien nie regtig glo wat sy sê nie. Oral om hulle praat mense opgewonde terwyl hulle hul middagete geniet, maar Harry, Ron en Hermien is so bekommerd oor Hagrid en Bokbok dat hulle nie kan saamgesels nie.

Harry en Ron se laaste vraestel is Waarsêery; Hermien s'n is Moggelstudies. Hulle loop saam op met die marmertrappe. Hermien verlaat hulle op die eerste verdieping en Harry en Ron loop tot by die sewende verdieping waar die grootste deel van hul klas op die wenteltrap voor professor Trelawney se klas sit en vir oulaas hul werk nagaan.

"Sy sien ons een-een," stel Neville hulle in kennis toe hulle langs hom gaan sit. Hy hou sy eksemplaar van *Ontnewel die Toekoms* oop op sy skoot by die bladsye wat oor kristalkyk gaan. "Het julle al ooit iets in 'n kristalbal gesien?" vra hy bekommerd.

"Nee," sê Ron in 'n ongeërgde stem. Hy kyk aanmekaar op sy horlosie; Harry weet hy tel die minute vir Bokbok se verhoor om te begin.

Die tou mense buitekant die klaskamer word baie stadig korter. Soos elke persoon met die silwer leer afklim, sis die klas, "Wat het sy gevra? Hoe was dit?"

Almal weier om te sê.

"Sy sê die kristalbal het vir haar gesê dat as ek vir julle vertel, dan sal iets verskrikliks met my gebeur!" piep Neville toe hy teen die leer afklim tot by Harry en Ron wat teen dié tyd op die trapportaal sit.

"Dis gerieflik," snork Ron. "Weet jy, ek begin dink dat Hermien reg was oor haar" (hy wys met sy duim na die valdeur bo hulle), "sy's 'n regte ou kroek."

"H'm," sê Harry en staar na sy horlosie. Dit is twee-uur. "Ek wens sy wil gou maak."

Parvati klim gloeiend van trots met die leer af ondertoe.

"Sy sê ek's 'n gebore Siener," sê sy vir Harry en Ron. "Ek het *hope* goed gesien . . . wel, sterkte!"

Sy hardloop met die wenteltrap af na Hildegard toe.

"Ronald Weasley," kom die bekende, mistige stem van bo hul koppe. Ron trek vir Harry skewebeek en klim met die silwer leer op boontoe. Nou is dit nog net Harry wat getoets moet word. Hy gaan sit gemaklik op die

vloer met sy rug teen die muur terwyl 'n vlieg teen die sonverligte venster gons. Sy gedagtes is by Hagrid aan die ander kant van die terrein.

Uiteindelik, na amper twintig minute, verskyn Ron se groot voete op die leer.

"Hoe was dit?" vra Harry terwyl hy regop kom.

"Gemors," sê Ron. "Kon niks sien nie, toe maak ek 'n klomp goed op. Dink nie sy't my geglo nie . . ."

"Sien jou nou-nou in die geselskamer," brom Harry toe professor Trelawney se stem "Harry Potter!" uitroep.

Die toringkamer is nog warmer as tevore; die gordyne is toegetrek, die vuur brand en die gewone sieklike geur laat Harry hoes toe hy verby die spul tafels en stoele sukkel na waar professor Trelawney voor 'n groot kristalbal op hom sit en wag.

"Goeiedag, skat," sê sy saggies. "As jy so vriendelik sal wees om in die Sfeer te kyk . . . gebruik jou tyd . . . dan sê jy vir my wat jy daarin sien . . ."

Harry buig oor die kristalbal en kyk intens, nes of hy dit wil dwing om vir hom iets anders as warrelende wit mis te wys, maar dit is tevergeefs.

"Wel?" moedig professor Trelawney hom versigtig aan. "Wat sien jy?"

Die hitte is oorweldigend en sy neusgate brand van die gegeurde rook wat uit die vuur langs hom dwarrel. Hy dink aan wat Ron gesê het en besluit om voor te gee.

"H'm -" sê Harry, "'n donker vorm . . . h'm . . ."

"Waarna lyk dit?" fluister professor Trelawney. "Dink mooi . . ."

Harry se gedagtes loop ver en wyd, dan dink hy aan Bokbok.

"'n Hippogrief," sê hy beslis.

"Inderdaad!" fluister professor Trelawney en skryf gretig op die perkament wat sy op haar knieë hou. "My seun, jy sien heel waarskynlik die uitkoms van die arme Hagrid se moeilikheid met die Ministerie vir Toewerkuns! Kyk goed . . . lyk dit of die Hippogrief nog . . . 'n kop het?"

"Ja," sê Harry beslis.

"Is jy seker?" por professor Trelawney hom aan. "Is jy heeltemal seker, skat? Jy sien nie dalk hoe dit op die grond lê en spartel nie, dalkies met 'n skaduagtige figuur wat 'n byl in die lug hou?"

"Nee!" sê Harry wat nou begin naar voel.

"Geen bloed nie? Geen huilende Hagrid?"

"Nee!" sê Harry weer en hy wens hy kan uit die oorverhitte kamer ontsnap. "Dit lyk perfek, dit - dit vlieg weg . . ."

Professor Trelawney sug.

"Wel, skat, ek dink ons moet dit daar laat . . . 'n bietjie teleurstellend . . . maar ek is seker jy het jou bes gedoen."

Harry tel sy tas verlig op en draai weg om uit te stap, maar dan klink 'n harde, skor stem skielik agter hom op.

“Dit gaan vannag gebeur.”

Harry draai om. Professor Trelawney het so styf soos 'n paal in haar leunstoel geword; haar oë is dof en haar mond hang oop.

“Ek-ekskuus?” sê Harry.

Dit lyk nie of professor Trelawney hom hoor nie. Haar oë begin rol. Harry is paniekbevange soos hy daar staan. Dit lyk of sy op die punt is om die een of ander toeval te kry. Hy aarsel, oorweeg dit om na die sieke-boeg te hardloop – maar dan kom professor Trelawney se stem weer, dieselfde skor stem, heeltemal anders as hoe sy gewoonlik praat.

“Die Donker Heer is alleen en sonder vriende, verlaat deur sy volgelinge. Sy dienskneg was vir twaalf jaar vasgekleuster. Vannag voor middernag sal die dienskneg losbreek en homself by sy meester skaar. Met sy dienskneg se hulp sal die Donker Heer weer verrys, groter en vreesliker as ooit tevore. Vannag . . . voor middernag . . . sal die dienskneg . . . hom by sy meester skaar . . .”

Professor Trelawney se kop val vooroor op haar borskas. Sy maak 'n soort snorkgeluid. Toe, heeltemal onverwags, ruk haar kop weer orent.

“Ek is jammer, my liewe kind,” sê sy dromerig. “Dis die hitte van die dag, weet jy . . . Ek het vir 'n oomblik weggedommel . . .”

Harry staan doodstil en gaap haar aan.

“Is iets fout, skat?”

“U – u het so pas vir my gesê dat die Donker Heer weer gaan verrys . . . dat sy dienskneg teruggaan na hom toe . . .”

Professor Trelawney lyk uit die veld geslaan.

“Die Donker Heer? Hy Wat Nie. Genoem Mag Word Nie? My liewe seun, dis kwalik iets om mee te spot . . . weer verrys, inderdaad . . .”

“Maar u het so gesê! U het gesê dat die Donker Heer –”

“Ek dink jy het ook ingedommel, skat!” sê professor Trelawney. “Ek sal beslis nie iets voorspel wat so vergesog is nie!”

Harry klouter na onder en loop met die wenteltrap af ondertoe terwyl hy wonder . . . het hy so pas gehoor hoe professor Trelawney 'n ware voorspelling maak? Of was dit net haar idee van 'n indrukwekkende einde aan die toets?

Vyf minute later storm hy verby die sekuriteitstrolle buite die ingang na die Griffindortoring terwyl professor Trelawney se woorde nog steeds in sy kop maal. Mense stap laggend en geselsend in die teenoorgestelde rigting verby hom op pad na die terrein vir 'n bietjie lang verwagte vryheid. Toe hy deur die portretopening in die geselskamer klim, is dit so te sê verlate. Ron en Hermien sit egter aan die oorkant in 'n hoek en wag.

“Professor Trelawney,” sê Harry hygend, “sy't so pas vir my gesê –”

Hy bly egter meteens stil toe hy hul gesigte sien.

“Bokbok het verloor,” sê Ron floutjies. “Hagrid het dit gestuur.”

Hierdie keer is Hagrid se briefie droog. Geen trane het daarop gedrup

nie, maar sy hand moet erg gebewe het, want dit wat hy geskryf het, is skaars leesbaar.

Het appèl verloor. Hulle gaan hom teen sonsondergang teregstel. Julle kan niks doen nie. Moenie kom nie. Ek wil nie hê julle moet dit sien nie. Hagrid.

"Ons moet gaan," sê Harry dadelik. "Hy kan nie daar op sy eie op die laksman sit en wag nie!"

"Sonsondergang," sê Ron wat met glasige oë deur die venster tuur.

"Ons sal nooit toegelaat word . . . veral nie jy nie, Harry . . ."

Harry se kop sink op sy hande terwyl hy dink.

"As ons net die onsigbaarheidsmantel gehad het . . ."

"Waar is dit?" sê Hermien.

Harry vertel haar hoe hy dit in die tunnel onder die eenoogheks gelos het.

" . . . as Snerp my weer daar moet sien, sal ek omtrent in die moeilikheid wees," eindig hy.

"Dis waar," sê Hermien terwyl sy opstaan. "As hy vir jou sien . . . Hoe maak 'n mens nou weer die heks se boggel oop?"

"Jy – jy tik daarteen en sê, 'Dissendium'," sê Harry, "maar –"

Hermien gee hom egter nie kans om die sin te voltooi nie; sy stap deur die vertrek, stoot die Vet Vrou se portret oop en verdwyn.

"Dink jy sy't dit gaan haal?" sê Ron terwyl hy haar agterna kyk.

Sy het. Hermien keer 'n kwartier later terug met die silwer mantel netjies opgevou onder haar kleed.

"Hermien, ek weet nie wat deesdae in jou gevaar het nie!" sê Ron verstom. "Eers slaan jy vir Malfoy, toe loop jy uit professor Trelawney se klas –"

Hermien lyk sowaar gevlei.

Hulle gaan saam met al die ander af vir aandete, maar keer nie daarna na die Griffindortoring toe terug nie. Harry het die mantel voor by sy kleed ingedruk; hy hou sy arms gevou voor sy bors om die knop weg te steek. Hulle skuil in 'n leë vertrek wat uit die ingangsportaal loop en wag tot hulle seker is dat die portaal verlate is. Hulle hoor hoe 'n laaste paar mense deur die portaal draf en hoe 'n deur toeslaan. Hermien steek haar kop om die kosyn.

"Oukei," fluister sy, "hier's niemand nie – sit die mantel om –"

Op hul tone loop hulle deur die portaal, na aan mekaar sodat niemand hulle moet sien nie. Toe stap hulle met die kliptrappe af na die terrein. Die son is reeds besig om agter die Verboode Woud weg te sink en dit tint die boonste takke met goue kleursel.

Toe hulle by Hagrid se hut kom, klop hulle. Dit neem 'n hele rukkie

voor hy die deur oopmaak. Hy bewe en is bleek in die gesig terwyl hy rondkyk om te sien waar sy besoeker is.

"Dis ons," sis Harry. "Ons dra die onsigbaarheidsmantel. Laat ons inkom sodat ons dit kan afhaal."

"Julle moes nie gekom het nie!" fluister Hagrid, maar hy gee tog pad sodat hulle kan inkom. Hagrid maak die deur vinnig toe en Harry gooi die mantel af.

Hagrid huil nie. Hy gooi homself ook nie om hul nekke nie. Hy lyk soos iemand wat nie weet waar hy is of wat hy doen nie. Dis erger om hierdie magteloosheid te sien as sy trane.

"Lus vir tee?" sê hy. Sy groot hande skud toe hy die ketel optel.

"Waar is Bokbok, Hagrid?" vra Hermien aarselend.

"Ek – ek het hom buitentoe geneem," sê Hagrid en mors melk op die tafel toe hy die beker vol skink. "Hy's vasmag in my pampoentuin. Gedink hy sal daarvan hou om die bome te sien en – en die vars lug te ruik – voor –"

Hagrid se hand bewe so woess dat die melkbeker uit sy greep val en in skerwe oor die vloer spat.

"Ek sal dit doen, Hagrid," sê Hermien vinnig terwyl sy nader staan en die gemors begin opvee.

"Daar's nog een in die kas," sê Hagrid. Hy gaan sit en vee sy voorkop aan sy mou af. Harry loer na Ron wat op sy beurt moedeloos na hom kyk.

"Is daar niks wat enigiemand kan doen nie, Hagrid?" vra Harry heftig terwyl hy langs hom gaan sit. "Dompeldorius –"

"Hy het probeer," sê Hagrid. "Hy het geen seggenskap oor die komitee nie. Hy't vir hulle gesê dat Bokbok oukei is, maar hulle is bang . . . julle weet hoe Lucius Malfoy is . . . het hulle gedreig, dink ek . . . en die laksman, Macnair, is 'n ou pël van Malfoy . . . maar dit sal vinnig en skoon wees . . . en ek sal langs hom staan . . ."

Hagrid sluk. Sy oë speel oor die hut asof hy 'n laaste greintjie hoop of troos soek.

"Dompeldorius gaan kom wanneer dit – wanneer dit gebeur. Het vanmôre vir my geskryf. Gesê hy wil – hy wil by my wees. Groot man, Dompeldorius . . ."

Hermien, wat in Hagrid se kas rondvoetel op soek na 'n melkbeker, gee 'n klein onderdrukte snikkie. Sy veg teen die trane toe sy beker in die hand regop kom.

"Ons sal ook by jou wees, Hagrid," begin sy, maar Hagrid skud sy groot harige kop.

"Julle sal bo in die kasteel wees. Ek't mos gesê ek wil nie hê dat julle dit sien nie. Julle moet in elk geval nie eens hier wees nie . . . As Broddelwerk of Dompeldorius jou hier vang so sonder verlof, Harry, is jy diep in die pekel."

Nou stroom die tranes oor Hermien se wange, maar sy steek dit vir Hagrid weg en begin om die tee te maak. Net toe sy die melkbottel optel om die beker vol te skink, los sy 'n kreet.

"Ron! Ek – ek glo dit nie – dis Skille!"

Ron gaap haar aan.

"Waarvan praat jy?"

Hermien dra die melkbeker na die tafel en dop dit om. Met 'n benoude gepiep en 'n wilde geskarrel gly Skille die rot uit op die tafel.

"Skille!" sê Ron verslae. "Skille, wat maak jy hier?"

Hy gryp die worstelende rot en hou hom teen die lig. Skille lyk verskriklik. Hy is maerder as ooit, sy hare het in klosse uitgeval sodat daar groot kaal kolle is en hy wriemel in Ron se hande asof hy desperaat is om weg te kom.

"Dis alles reg, Skille!" sê Ron. "Hier's geen katte nie! Hier's niks wat jou kan seermaak nie!"

Hagrid staan skielik op en staar na die venster. Sy rooierige gesig het plotseling so bleek soos perkament geword.

"Hier kom hulle . . ."

Harry, Ron en Hermien swaai om. 'n Groep manne kom met die trappe voor die kasteel af gestap. Heel voor loop Albus Dompeldorius en sy silwer baard glinster in die sterwende son. Langs hom trippel Cornelius Broddelwerk. Agter hulle volg die stokou komiteelid en die laksman, Macnair.

"Julle moet gaan," sê Hagrid. Hy bewe oor sy hele liggaam. "Hulle mag julle nie hier kry nie . . . toe, loop . . ."

Ron druk vir Skille in sy sak en Hermien tel die mantel op.

"Ek sal julle agter uitlaat," sê Hagrid.

Hulle volg hom na die deur wat na sy agtertuin lei. Harry voel vreemd onwerklik, en nog meer so toe hy vir Bokbok 'n paar tree verder sien staan. Hy is vasgemaak aan 'n boom langs Hagrid se pampoentuin. Di lyk of Bokbok weet dat iets gaan gebeur. Hy draai sy skerp kop van kant tot kant en kap-kap senuagtig met sy hoewe in die grond.

"Alles reg, Bokkie," sê Hagrid sag. "Alles reg . . ." Hy draai na Harry, Ron en Hermien. "Toe, toe, weg is julle."

Hulle beweeg egter nie.

"Hagrid, ons kan mos nie –"

"Ons sal vir hulle sê wat regtig gebeur het –"

"Hulle kan hom nie wil doodmaak nie –"

"Loop!" sê Hagrid kwaai. "Dis al erg genoeg sonder dat julle spul ook nog in die moeilikheid kom!"

Hulle het nie 'n keuse nie. Net toe Hermien die mantel oor Harry en Ron gooi, hoor hulle stemme voor die hut. Hagrid kyk na die plek waar hulle so pas nog was.

“Maak gou,” sê hy skor. “Moenie luister nie . . .”

Hy gaan na sy hut terwyl iemand aan die voordeur klop.

Stadig, in ’n aaklige soort beswyming, loop Harry, Ron en Hermien agterom Hagrid se huis. Toe hulle aan die ander kant kom, gaan die voordeur met ’n harde klikgeluid toe.

“Kom ons maak gou, asseblief,” fluister Hermien. “Ek kan dit nie vat nie, ek kan net nie . . .”

Hulle stap teen die skuins grasperk op na die kasteel toe. Die son sak nou vinnig weg; die lug het ’n helder, perserige grys geword, maar in die weste talm ’n robynrooi gloed.

Ron gaan skielik doodstil staan.

“Asseblief, Ron,” begin Hermien.

“Dis Skille – hy wil nie – stilsit nie –”

Ron is dubbeld gevou soos hy sukkel om vir Skille in sy sak te hou, maar dis of die rot besig is om mal te word. Hy piep verwilderd, skop en spartel en probeer om sy tande in Ron se hand te slaan.

“Skille, dis ek, jou idioot, dis Ron,” sis Ron.

Agter hulle hoor hulle hoe ’n deur oopgaan en mans se stemme.

“Ron, asseblief, kom ons waai, hulle gaan dit doen!” smeek Hermien.

“Goed – Skille, *plat* –”

Hulle stap aan. Net soos Hermien, probeer Harry om nie na die gerammel van stemme agter hulle te luister nie. Ron steek egter weer vas.

“Ek kan hom nie vashou nie – Skille, hou jou snater, almal sal ons hoor –”

Die rot piep wild, maar nie hard genoeg om die geluide wat uit Hagrid se tuin kom, te demp nie. Dis ’n roesemoes van dowwe manstemme, ’n stilte en toe, sonder verdere waarskuwing, die onmiskenbare gesuis en geklap van ’n byl.

Hermien is onvas op haar voete.

“Hulle het dit gedoen!” fluister sy vir Harry. “Ek g-glo dit nie – hulle het dit gedoen!”

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN



CAT, RAT, AND DOG

Harry's mind had gone blank with shock. The three of them stood transfixed with horror under the Invisibility Cloak. The very last rays of the setting sun were casting a bloody light over the long-shadowed grounds. Then, behind them, they heard a wild howling.

"Hagrid," Harry muttered. Without thinking about what he was doing, he made to turn back, but both Ron and Hermione seized his arms.

"We can't," said Ron, who was paper-white. "He'll be in worse trouble if they know we've been to see him. . . ."

Hermione's breathing was shallow and uneven.

"How — could — they?" she choked. "How *could* they?"

"Come on," said Ron, whose teeth seemed to be chattering

They set off back toward the castle, walking slowly to keep themselves hidden under the Cloak. The light was fading fast now. By the time they reached open ground, darkness was settling like a spell around them.

“Scabbers, keep still,” Ron hissed, clamping his hand over his chest. The rat was wriggling madly. Ron came to a sudden halt, trying to force Scabbers deeper into his pocket. “What’s the matter with you, you stupid rat? Stay still — OUCH! He bit me!”

“Ron, be quiet!” Hermione whispered urgently. “Fudge’ll be out here in a minute —”

“He won’t — stay — put —”

Scabbers was plainly terrified. He was writhing with all his might, trying to break free of Ron’s grip.

“What’s the *matter* with him?”

But Harry had just seen — slinking toward them, his body low to the ground, wide yellow eyes glinting eerily in the darkness — Crookshanks. Whether he could see them or was following the sound of Scabbers’s squeaks, Harry couldn’t tell.

“Crookshanks!” Hermione moaned. “No, go away, Crookshanks! Go away!”

But the cat was getting nearer —

“Scabbers — NO!”

Too late — the rat had slipped between Ron’s clutching fingers, hit the ground, and scampered away. In one bound, Crookshanks sprang after him, and before Harry or Hermione could stop him, Ron had thrown the Invisibility Cloak off himself and pelted away into the darkness.

"Ron!" Hermione moaned.

She and Harry looked at each other, then followed at a sprint; it was impossible to run full out under the Cloak; they pulled it off and it streamed behind them like a banner as they hurtled after Ron; they could hear his feet thundering along ahead and his shouts at Crookshanks.

"Get away from him — get away — Scabbers, come *here* —"

There was a loud thud.

"*Gotcha!* Get off, you stinking cat —"

Harry and Hermione almost fell over Ron; they skidded to a stop right in front of him. He was sprawled on the ground, but Scabbers was back in his pocket; he had both hands held tight over the quivering lump.

"Ron — come on — back under the cloak —" Hermione panted. "Dumbledore — the Minister — they'll be coming back out in a minute —"

But before they could cover themselves again, before they could even catch their breath, they heard the soft pounding of gigantic paws. . . . Something was bounding toward them out of the dark — an enormous, pale-eyed, jet-black dog.

Harry reached for his wand, but too late — the dog had made an enormous leap and the front paws hit him on the chest; he keeled over backward in a whirl of hair; he felt its hot breath, saw inch-long teeth —

But the force of its leap had carried it too far; it rolled off him. Dazed, feeling as though his ribs were broken, Harry tried to stand up; he could hear it growling as it skidded around for a new attack.

Ron was on his feet. As the dog sprang back toward them he pushed Harry aside; the dog's jaws fastened instead around Ron's outstretched arm. Harry lunged forward, he seized a handful of the brute's hair, but it was dragging Ron away as easily as though he were a rag doll —

Then, out of nowhere, something hit Harry so hard across the face he was knocked off his feet again. He heard Hermione shriek with pain and fall too.

Harry groped for his wand, blinking blood out of his eyes. —

"Lumos!" he whispered.

The wandlight showed him the trunk of a thick tree; they had chased Scabbers into the shadow of the Whomping Willow and its branches were creaking as though in a high wind, whipping backward and forward to stop them going nearer.

And there, at the base of the trunk, was the dog, dragging Ron backward into a large gap in the roots — Ron was fighting furiously, but his head and torso were slipping out of sight —

"Ron!" Harry shouted, trying to follow, but a heavy branch whipped lethally through the air and he was forced backward again.

All they could see now was one of Ron's legs, which he had hooked around a root in an effort to stop the dog from pulling him farther underground — but a horrible crack cut the air like a gunshot; Ron's leg had broken, and a moment later, his foot vanished from sight.

"Harry — we've got to go for help. —" Hermione gasped; she was bleeding too; the Willow had cut her across the shoulder.

"No! That thing's big enough to eat him, we haven't got time. —"

“We’re never going to get through without help —”

Another branch whipped down at them, twigs clenched like knuckles.

“If that dog can get in, we can,” Harry panted, darting here and there, trying to find a way through the vicious, swishing branches, but he couldn’t get an inch nearer to the tree roots without being in range of the tree’s blows.

“Oh, help, help,” Hermione whispered frantically, dancing uncertainly on the spot, “please . . .”

Crookshanks darted forward. He slithered between the battering branches like a snake and placed his front paws upon a knot on the trunk.

Abruptly, as though the tree had been turned to marble, it stopped moving. Not a leaf twitched or shook.

“Crookshanks!” Hermione whispered uncertainly. She now grasped Harry’s arm painfully hard. “How did he know — ?”

“He’s friends with that dog,” said Harry grimly. “I’ve seen them together. Come on — and keep your wand out —”

They covered the distance to the trunk in seconds, but before they had reached the gap in the roots, Crookshanks had slid into it with a flick of his bottlebrush tail. Harry went next; he crawled forward, headfirst, and slid down an earthy slope to the bottom of a very low tunnel. Crookshanks was a little way along, his eyes flashing in the light from Harry’s wand. Seconds later, Hermione slithered down beside him.

“Where’s Ron?” she whispered in a terrified voice.

“This way,” said Harry, setting off, bent-backed, after

Crookshanks.

“Where does this tunnel come out?” Hermione asked breathlessly from behind him.

“I don’t know. . . . It’s marked on the Marauder’s Map but Fred and George said no one’s ever gotten into it. . . . It goes off the edge of the map, but it looked like it ends up in Hogsmeade. . . .”

They moved as fast as they could, bent almost double, ahead of them, Crookshanks’s tail bobbed in and out of view. On and on went the passage; it felt at least as long as the one to Honeydukes. . . . All Harry could think of was Ron and what the enormous dog might be doing to him. . . . He was drawing breath in sharp, painful gasps, running at a crouch. . . .

And then the tunnel began to rise; moments later it twisted, and Crookshanks had gone. Instead, Harry could see a patch of dim light through a small opening.

He and Hermione paused, gasping for breath, edging forward. Both raised their wands to see what lay beyond.

It was a room, a very disordered, dusty room. Paper was peeling from the walls; there were stains all over the floor; every piece of furniture was broken as though somebody had smashed it. The windows were all boarded up.

Harry glanced at Hermione, who looked very frightened but nodded.

Harry pulled himself out of the hole, staring around. The room was deserted, but a door to their right stood open, leading to a shadowy hallway. Hermione suddenly grabbed Harry’s arm again. Her wide eyes were traveling around the boarded windows.

“Harry,” she whispered, “I think we’re in the Shrieking Shack.”

Harry looked around. His eyes fell on a wooden chair near them. Large chunks had been torn out of it; one of the legs had been ripped off entirely.

“Ghosts didn’t do that,” he said slowly.

At that moment, there was a creak overhead. Something had moved upstairs. Both of them looked up at the ceiling. Hermione’s grip on Harry’s arm was so tight he was losing feeling in his fingers. He raised his eyebrows at her; she nodded again and let go.

Quietly as they could, they crept out into the hall and up the crumbling staircase. Everything was covered in a thick layer of dust except the floor, where a wide shiny stripe had been made by something being dragged upstairs.

They reached the dark landing.

“Nox,” they whispered together, and the lights at the end of their wands went out. Only one door was open. As they crept toward it, they heard movement from behind it; a low moan, and then a deep, loud purring. They exchanged a last look, a last nod.

Wand held tightly before him, Harry kicked the door wide open.

On a magnificent four-poster bed with dusty hangings lay Crookshanks, purring loudly at the sight of them. On the floor beside him, clutching his leg, which stuck out at a strange angle, was Ron.

Harry and Hermione dashed across to him.

“Ron — are you okay?”

“Where’s the dog?”

“Not a dog,” Ron moaned. His teeth were gritted with pain.

“Harry, it’s a trap —”

“What —”

“He’s the dog . . . he’s an Animagus. . . .”

Ron was staring over Harry’s shoulder. Harry wheeled around. With a snap, the man in the shadows closed the door behind them.

A mass of filthy, matted hair hung to his elbows. If eyes hadn’t been shining out of the deep, dark sockets, he might have been a corpse. The waxy skin was stretched so tightly over the bones of his face, it looked like a skull. His yellow teeth were bared in a grin. It was Sirius Black.

“Expelliarmus!” he croaked, pointing Ron’s wand at them.

Harry’s and Hermione’s wands shot out of their hands, high in the air, and Black caught them. Then he took a step closer. His eyes were fixed on Harry.

“I thought you’d come and help your friend,” he said hoarsely. His voice sounded as though he had long since lost the habit of using it. “Your father would have done the same for me. Brave of you, not to run for a teacher. I’m grateful . . . it will make everything much easier. . . .”

The taunt about his father rang in Harry’s ears as though Black had bellowed it. A boiling hate erupted in Harry’s chest, leaving no place for fear. For the first time in his life, he wanted his wand back in his hand, not to defend himself, but to attack . . . to kill. Without knowing what he was doing, he started forward, but there was a sudden movement on either side of him and two pairs of hands grabbed him and held him back. . . . “No, Harry!” Hermione gasped in a petrified whisper; Ron, however, spoke to Black.

“If you want to kill Harry, you’ll have to kill us too!” he said

fiercely, though the effort of standing upright was draining him of still more color, and he swayed slightly as he spoke.

Something flickered in Black's shadowed eyes.

"Lie down," he said quietly to Ron. "You will damage that leg even more."

"Did you hear me?" Ron said weakly, though he was clinging painfully to Harry to stay upright. "You'll have to kill all three of us!"

"There'll be only one murder here tonight," said Black, and his grin widened.

"Why's that?" Harry spat, trying to wrench himself free of Ron and Hermione. "Didn't care last time, did you? Didn't mind slaughtering all those Muggles to get at Pettigrew. . . . What's the matter, gone soft in Azkaban?"

"Harry!" Hermione whimpered. "Be quiet!"

"HE KILLED MY MUM AND DAD!" Harry roared, and with a huge effort he broke free of Hermione's and Ron's restraint and lunged forward —

He had forgotten about magic — he had forgotten that he was short and skinny and thirteen, whereas Black was a tall, full-grown man — all Harry knew was that he wanted to hurt Black as badly as he could, and that he didn't care how much he got hurt in return —

Perhaps it was the shock of Harry doing something so stupid, but Black didn't raise the wands in time — one of Harry's hands fastened over his wasted wrist, forcing the wand tips away; the knuckles of Harry's other hand collided with the side of Black's head and they fell, backward, into the wall —

Hermione was screaming, Ron was yelling, there was a blinding

flash as the wands in Black's hand sent a jet of sparks into the air that missed Harry's face by inches; Harry felt the shrunken arm under his fingers twisting madly, but he clung on, his other hand punching every part of Black it could find.

But Black's free hand had found Harry's throat —

"No," he hissed, "I've waited too long —"

The fingers tightened, Harry choked, his glasses askew.

Then he saw Hermione's foot swing out of nowhere. Black let go of Harry with a grunt of pain; Ron had thrown himself on Black's wand hand and Harry heard a faint clatter —

He fought free of the tangle of bodies and saw his own wand rolling across the floor; he threw himself toward it but —

"Argh!"

Crookshanks had joined the fray; both sets of front claws had sunk themselves deep into Harry's arm; Harry threw him off, but Crookshanks now darted toward Harry's wand —

"NO YOU DON'T!" roared Harry, and he aimed a kick at Crookshanks that made the cat leap aside, spitting; Harry snatched up his wand and turned —

"Get out of the way!" he shouted at Ron and Hermione.

They didn't need telling twice. Hermione, gasping for breath, her lip bleeding, scrambled aside, snatching up her and Ron's wands. Ron crawled to the four-poster and collapsed onto it, panting, his white face now tinged with green, both hands clutching his broken leg.

Black was sprawled at the bottom of the wall. His thin chest rose and fell rapidly as he watched Harry walking slowly nearer, his

wand pointing straight at Black's heart.

"Going to kill me, Harry?" he whispered.

Harry stopped right above him, his wand still pointing at Black's chest, looking down at him. A livid bruise was rising around Black's left eye and his nose was bleeding.

"You killed my parents," said Harry, his voice shaking slightly, but his wand hand quite steady.

Black stared up at him out of those sunken eyes.

"I don't deny it," he said very quietly. "But if you knew the whole story —"

"The whole story?" Harry repeated, a furious pounding in his ears. "You sold them to Voldemort. That's all I need to know."

"You've got to listen to me," Black said, and there was a note of urgency in his voice now. "You'll regret it if you don't. . . . You don't understand. . . ."

"I understand a lot better than you think," said Harry, and his voice shook more than ever. "You never heard her, did you? My mum trying to stop Voldemort killing me . . . and you did that . . . you did it. . . ."

Before either of them could say another word, something ginger streaked past Harry; Crookshanks leapt onto Black's chest and settled himself there, right over Black's heart. Black blinked and looked down at the cat.

"Get off," he murmured, trying to push Crookshanks off him.

But Crookshanks sank his claws into Black's robes and wouldn't shift. He turned his ugly, squashed face to Harry and looked up at him with those great yellow eyes. To his right, Hermione gave a dry sob.

Harry stared down at Black and Crookshanks, his grip tightening on the wand. So what if he had to kill the cat too? It was in league with Black. . . . If it was prepared to die, trying to protect Black, that wasn't Harry's business. . . . If Black wanted to save it, that only proved he cared more for Crookshanks than for Harry's parents. . . .

Harry raised the wand. Now was the moment to do it. Now was the moment to avenge his mother and father. He was going to kill Black. He had to kill Black. This was his chance. . . .

The seconds lengthened. And still Harry stood frozen there, wand poised, Black staring up at him, Crookshanks on his chest. Ron's ragged breathing came from the bed; Hermione was quite silent.

And then came a new sound —

Muffled footsteps were echoing up through the floor — someone was moving downstairs.

"WE'RE UP HERE!" Hermione screamed suddenly. "WE'RE UP HERE — SIRIUS BLACK — *QUICK!*"

Black made a startled movement that almost dislodged Crookshanks; Harry gripped his wand convulsively — *Do it now!* said a voice in his head — but the footsteps were thundering up the stairs and Harry still hadn't done it.

The door of the room burst open in a shower of red sparks and Harry wheeled around as Professor Lupin came hurtling into the room, his face bloodless, his wand raised and ready. His eyes flickered over Ron, lying on the floor, over Hermione, cowering next to the door, to Harry, standing there with his wand covering Black, and then to Black himself, crumpled and bleeding at Harry's feet.

"*Expelliarmus!*" Lupin shouted.

Harry's wand flew once more out of his hand; so did the two Hermione was holding. Lupin caught them all deftly, then moved into the room, staring at Black, who still had Crookshanks lying protectively across his chest.

Harry stood there, feeling suddenly empty. He hadn't done it. His nerve had failed him. Black was going to be handed back to the dementors.

Then Lupin spoke in an odd voice, a voice that shook with some suppressed emotion.

"Where is he, Sirius?"

Harry looked quickly at Lupin. He didn't understand what Lupin meant. Who was Lupin talking about? He turned to look at Black again.

Black's face was quite expressionless. For a few seconds, he didn't move at all. Then, very slowly, he raised his empty hand and pointed straight at Ron. Mystified, Harry glanced around at Ron, who looked bewildered.

"But then . . .," Lupin muttered, staring at Black so intently it seemed he was trying to read his mind, ". . . why hasn't he shown himself before now? Unless" — Lupin's eyes suddenly widened, as though he was seeing something beyond Black, something none of the rest could see — "unless *he* was the one . . . unless you switched . . . without telling me?"

Very slowly, his sunken gaze never leaving Lupin's face, Black nodded.

"Professor," Harry interrupted loudly, "what's going on — ?"

But he never finished the question, because what he saw made his

voice die in his throat. Lupin was lowering his wand, gazing fixedly at Black. The professor walked to Black's side, seized his hand, pulled him to his feet so that Crookshanks fell to the floor, and embraced Black like a brother.

Harry felt as though the bottom had dropped out of his stomach.

"I DON'T BELIEVE IT!" Hermione screamed.

Lupin let go of Black and turned to her. She had raised herself off the floor and was pointing at Lupin, wild-eyed. "You — you —"

"Hermione —"

"— you and him!"

"Hermione, calm down —"

"I didn't tell anyone!" Hermione shrieked. "I've been covering up for you —"

"Hermione, listen to me, please!" Lupin shouted. "I can explain —"

Harry could feel himself shaking, not with fear, but with a fresh wave of fury.

"I trusted you," he shouted at Lupin, his voice wavering out of control, "and all the time you've been his friend!"

"You're wrong," said Lupin. "I haven't been Sirius's friend, but I am now — Let me explain. . . ."

"NO!" Hermione screamed. "Harry, don't trust him, he's been helping Black get into the castle, he wants you dead too — *he's a werewolf!*"

There was a ringing silence. Everyone's eyes were now on Lupin, who looked remarkably calm, though rather pale.

“Not at all up to your usual standard, Hermione,” he said. “Only one out of three, I’m afraid. I have not been helping Sirius get into the castle and I certainly don’t want Harry dead. . . .” An odd shiver passed over his face. “But I won’t deny that I am a werewolf.”

Ron made a valiant effort to get up again but fell back with a whimper of pain. Lupin made toward him, looking concerned, but Ron gasped,

“Get away from me, werewolf!”

Lupin stopped dead. Then, with an obvious effort, he turned to Hermione and said, “How long have you known?”

“Ages,” Hermione whispered. “Since I did Professor Snape’s essay. . . .”

“He’ll be delighted,” said Lupin coolly. “He assigned that essay hoping someone would realize what my symptoms meant. . . . Did you check the lunar chart and realize that I was always ill at the full moon? Or did you realize that the boggart changed into the moon when it saw me?”

“Both,” Hermione said quietly.

Lupin forced a laugh.

“You’re the cleverest witch of your age I’ve ever met, Hermione.”

“I’m not,” Hermione whispered. “If I’d been a bit cleverer, I’d have told everyone what you are!”

“But they already know,” said Lupin. “At least, the staff do.”

“Dumbledore hired you when he knew you were a werewolf?” Ron gasped. “Is he mad?”

“Some of the staff thought so,” said Lupin. “He had to work very hard to convince certain teachers that I’m trustworthy —”

“AND HE WAS WRONG!” Harry yelled. “YOU’VE BEEN HELPING HIM ALL THE TIME!” He was pointing at Black, who suddenly crossed to the four-poster bed and sank onto it, his face hidden in one shaking hand. Crookshanks leapt up beside him and stepped onto his lap, purring. Ron edged away from both of them, dragging his leg.

“I have *not* been helping Sirius,” said Lupin. “If you’ll give me a chance, I’ll explain. Look —”

He separated Harry’s, Ron’s, and Hermione’s wands and threw each back to its owner; Harry caught his, stunned.

“There,” said Lupin, sticking his own wand back into his belt. “You’re armed, we’re not. Now will you listen?”

Harry didn’t know what to think. Was it a trick?

“If you haven’t been helping him,” he said, with a furious glance at Black, “how did you know he was here?”

“The map,” said Lupin. “The Marauder’s Map. I was in my office examining it —”

“You know how to work it?” Harry said suspiciously.

“Of course I know how to work it,” said Lupin, waving his hand impatiently. “I helped write it. I’m Moony — that was my friends’ nickname for me at school.”

“You *wrote* — ?”

“The important thing is, I was watching it carefully this evening, because I had an idea that you, Ron, and Hermione might try and sneak out of the castle to visit Hagrid before his hippogriff was executed. And I was right, wasn’t I?”

He had started to pace up and down, looking at them. Little patches

of dust rose at his feet.

“You might have been wearing your father’s old Cloak, Harry —”

“How d’you know about the Cloak?”

“The number of times I saw James disappearing under it . . . ,” said Lupin, waving an impatient hand again. “The point is, even if you’re wearing an Invisibility Cloak, you still show up on the Marauder’s Map. I watched you cross the grounds and enter Hagrid’s hut. Twenty minutes later, you left Hagrid, and set off back toward the castle. But you were now accompanied by somebody else.”

“What?” said Harry. “No, we weren’t!”

“I couldn’t believe my eyes,” said Lupin, still pacing, and ignoring Harry’s interruption. “I thought the map must be malfunctioning. How could he be with you?”

“No one was with us!” said Harry.

“And then I saw another dot, moving fast toward you, labeled *Sirius Black*. . . . I saw him collide with you; I watched as he pulled two of you into the Whomping Willow —”

“One of us!” Ron said angrily.

“No, Ron,” said Lupin. “Two of you.”

He had stopped his pacing, his eyes moving over Ron.

“Do you think I could have a look at the rat?” he said evenly.

“What?” said Ron. “What’s Scabbers got to do with it?”

“Everything,” said Lupin. “Could I see him, please?”

Ron hesitated, then put a hand inside his robes. Scabbers emerged, thrashing desperately; Ron had to seize his long bald tail to stop him escaping. Crookshanks stood up on Black’s leg and made a soft

hissing noise.

Lupin moved closer to Ron. He seemed to be holding his breath as he gazed intently at Scabbers.

“What?” Ron said again, holding Scabbers close to him, looking scared. “What’s my rat got to do with anything?”

“That’s not a rat,” croaked Sirius Black suddenly.

“What d’you mean — of course he’s a rat —”

“No, he’s not,” said Lupin quietly. “He’s a wizard.”

“An Animagus,” said Black, “by the name of Peter Pettigrew.”

Kat, Rot en Hond

Harry is so geskok dat hy skaars kan dink. Die driestuks staan bewegingloos van walging daar onder die onsigbaarheidsmantel. Die ondergaande son se laaste strale gooi 'n bloedrooi lig oor die lang skaduwees op die terrein. Agter hulle hoor hulle 'n wilde kreet.

"Hagrid," stamel Harry. Sonder om mooi te dink wat hy doen, swaai hy om, maar Ron en Hermien gryp sy arms vas.

"Ons kan nie," sê Ron wat wasbleek is. "Hy sal nog dieper in die moeilikheid kom as hulle moet weet dat ons vir hom gaan kuier het."

Hermien se asem kom vlak en hortend.

"Hoe – kon – hulle?" wurg sy dit uit. "Hoe *kon* hulle?"

"Komaan," sê Ron met klapperende tande.

Hulle sit af kasteel toe. Hulle moet stadig stap om seker te maak dat hulle onder die mantel versteek bly. Dit word nou vinnig donker. Teen die tyd dat hulle oop terrein bereik het, het die donkerte reeds soos 'n toverspreuk oor hulle toegesak.

"Skille, sit stil!" sis Ron en druk sy hand oor sy bors. Die rot kriewel vir die vale. Ron gaan meteens botstil staan en probeer om vir Skille dieper in sy sak te druk. "Wat makeer jou, jou simpele rot? Sit stil – EINA! Hy't my gebyt!"

"Ron, hou jou snater!" fluister Hermien dringend. "Broddelwerk kan enige oomblik hier buite wees –"

"As hy net wil – stil – sit –"

Dit is duidelik dat Skille tot die dood toe verskrik is. Hy spook en spartel so wat hy kan in 'n poging om uit Ron se greep te ontsnap.

"Wat makeer hom?"

Harry het egter iets gesien – iets wat, met sy liggaam plat teen die grond en met groot geel oë wat onheilspellend in die duisternis blink, na hulle toe sluip – Kromskeen. Of hy hulle kan sien en of hy bloot die geluid van Skille se gepiep volg, kan Harry nie sê nie.

"Kromskeen!" kerm Hermien. "Nee, gaan weg, Kromskeen! Gaan weg!"

Die kat kom egter al nader –

“Skille – NEE!”

Dit is te laat – die rot glip deur Ron se vingers, tref die grond en skarrel weg. Kromskeen trek met 'n boog agterna en voor Harry of Hermien hom kan keer, gooi Ron die onsigbaarheidsmantel van hom af en storm die donkerte in.

“Ron!” kreun Hermien.

Sy en Harry kyk na mekaar, dan sit hulle hom agterna; dit is onmoontlik om voluit te hardloop so onder die mantel, dus pluk hulle dit af sodat dit soos 'n banier agter hulle wapper terwyl hulle agter Ron aan nael. Hulle kan hoor hoe sy voete ver voor hulle klap en hoe hy op Kromskeen skree.

“Los hom uit – gaan weg – Skille, kom hier –”

Daar is 'n harde slag.

“Het jou! Voertsek, jou stinkende kat –”

Harry en Hermien val amper oor Ron; reg voor hom gly hulle tot stilstand. Hy lê uitgestrek op die grond, maar Skille is terug in sy sak en hy hou albei sy hande oor die bewende knop.

“Ron – kom terug – onder die mantel –” sê Hermien hortend. “Dompeldorius – die Minister – hulle gaan enige oomblik hier wees –”

Voor hulle hulself egter kan toegooi, voor hulle selfs kan asem skep, hoor hulle die sagte gedoef-doef van reusepote. Iets storm uit die donker op hulle af – 'n enorme inkswart hond met bleek oë.

Harry gryp na sy towerstaf, maar dit is te laat – die hond raap hom op en spring sodat sy voorpote hom teen die borskas tref. In 'n warreling van hare tuimel hy agteroor; hy voel die warm asem, sien die lang slagande –

Die geweld van die sprong het die hond egter te ver gevoer en dit rol oor hom. Harry probeer verdwaas om op te staan; dit voel of sy ribbes gebreek is en hy hoor hoe die hond grom toe dit vir 'n hernude aanval omswaai.

Ron is egter orent. Toe die hond weer spring, stamp hy vir Harry uit die pad, maar die hond se tande sluit om Ron se uitgestrekte arm. Harry bespring hom en kry 'n hand vol van die ondiere se hare beet, maar dit sleep Ron weg, so maklik asof Ron 'n lappop is –

Toe, asof van nêrens, slaan iets Harry deur die gesig sodat hy oor die grond skuif. Hy hoor hoe Hermien van pyn skree en hoe ook sy neerslaan. Harry soek na sy towerstaf en vee die bloed uit sy oë –

“Lumos!” fluister hy.

In die lig van die towerstaf sien hy die stam van 'n dik boom. Toe hulle agter Skille aan gehardloop het, moes hulle hom tot by die Woelige Wilg gevolg het. Die Wilg se takke kraak asof 'n sterk wind daardeur waai en swaai heen en weer en kap hulle weg elke keer dat hulle probeer nader kom.

En daar, aan die onderkant van die stam, is die hond besig om vir Ron

na 'n groot opening tussen die wortels te sleep – Ron sit hom verbete teë, maar sy kop en bolyf is reeds buite sig –

“Ron!” skree Harry, en probeer hom agternasit, maar 'n swaar tak swaai deur die lug en dwing hom om terug te val.

Al wat hulle nou kan sien, is een van Ron se bene wat hy om 'n wortel gehaak het in 'n poging om te keer dat die hond hom verder onder die grond insleep. Toe klief 'n aaklige klapgeluid soos 'n gewerskoot deur die lug; Ron se been het gebreek, en die volgende oomblik verdwyn ook sy voet.

“Harry – ons moet gaan hulp soek –” skree Hermien. Ook sy is aan die bloei; die Wilg het haar skouer stukkend geslaan.

“Nee! Daardie ding is groot genoeg om hom te eet, daar is nie tyd nie –”

“Ons sal nooit sonder hulp daar inkom nie –”

Nog 'n tak slaan na hulle, klein takkies vou soos kneukels toe.

“As daardie hond kan in, dan kan ons ook,” hyg Harry terwyl hy rondartel in 'n poging om 'n pad deur die wildswaaiende takke te kry, maar hy kan nie naby die boom se wortels kom en terselfdertyd buite bereik van die wilde houe bly nie.

“O, help, help,” fluister Hermien beangs terwyl sy besluiteloos op een plek rondtrippel, “asseblief tog . . .”

Net toe spring Kromskeen vorentoe. Hy glip soos 'n slang deur die swaaiende takke en plaas sy pote op 'n kwas in die stam.

Plotseling, asof die boom in marmer verander het, hou dit op beweeg. Nie 'n blaar ritsel of roer nie.

“Kromskeen!” fluister Hermien onseker. Sy gryp Harry hard aan die arm. “Hoe het hy geweet –?”

“Hy's maats met daardie hond,” sê Harry grimmig. “Ek het hulle al saam gesien. Komaan – hou jou towerstaf gereed –”

Hulle lê die afstand na die stam binne sekondes af, maar nog voor hulle by die gat tussen die wortels kan kom, het Kromskeen reeds met 'n flits van sy borselstert deurgeglip. Harry volg hom; hy kruip kop eerste deur en gly teen 'n helling af tot in 'n baie lae tunnel onder die grond. Kromskeen is al 'n ent verder, sy oë blits in die lig van Harry se towerstaf. Oomblikke later gly Hermien ook tot langs hom.

“Waar is Ron?” fluister sy in 'n benoude stem.

“Hierdie kant toe,” sê Harry en stap gebukkend agter Kromskeen aan.

“Waarheen gaan hierdie tunnel?” vra Hermien uitasem van agter hom.

“Ek weet nie . . . dis gemerk op die Plunderaar se Kaart, maar Fred en George het gesê dat niemand dit ooit gebruik nie. Dit loop van die kaart af, maar dit lyk of dit na Hogsmeade toe gaan . . .”

Hulle is amper dubbeld gevou en beweeg so vinnig as wat hulle kan; Kromskeen se stert verskyn en verdwyn ver voor hulle. Die tunnel gaan aan en aan; dit voel ten minste so lank soos die een wat na Honeydukes

lei. Al waaraan Harry kan dink, is aan Ron, en wat die enorme hond dalk aan hom doen . . . hy haal pynlik hortend asem en hardloop gebukkend aan.

Toe begin die tunnel styg; oomblikke later maak dit 'n draai en Kromskeen verdwyn. Deur 'n klein opening voor hom sien Harry 'n dowwe ligkol.

Hygend na asem steek hy en Hermien vas. Dan beweeg hulle suutjies nader. Hulle hou hul towerstawwe voor hulle sodat hulle voor hulle kan sien.

Dit is 'n kamer, 'n baie deurmekaar en stowwerige kamer. Papier hang in repe van die mure af; daar is vlekke op die vloer; al die meubels is uitmekaar gebreek asof iemand dit stukkend geslaan het. Die vensters is met planke toegespyker.

Harry loer na Hermien wat baie bang lyk, maar tog knik.

Harry hys homself deur die opening en kyk om hom rond. Die vertrek is leeg, maar regs van hulle is 'n deur wat oopstaan en na 'n donker portaal lei. Weer gryp Hermien vir Harry onverwags aan die arm. Met wyd-gerekte oë staan sy na die toegespykerde vensters.

"Harry," fluister sy. "Ek dink ons is in die Kermende Krot."

Harry kyk om hom. Sy oë val op 'n houtstoel kort by hulle. Groot stukke is daaruit gebreek en een van die pote is heeltemal uitgeskeur.

"Spoke doen tog nie sulke goed nie," sê hy stadig.

Op daardie oomblik kraak iets bokant hulle. Iets het daar bo beweeg. Hulle kyk albei op na die plafon. Hermien hou Harry se arm so styf vas dat hy die gevoel in sy vingers verloor. Hy trek 'n gesig en beduie vir haar met sy wenkbroue en sy knik en laat los.

Hulle kruip so suutjies moontlik na die portaal en op met die verbrokkelende trappe. Alles is bedek met 'n dik laag stof behalwe die vloer waar 'n breë blink streep wys dat iets met die trappe uitgesleep is.

Hulle kom by 'n donker trapportaal.

"Nox," fluister hulle albei en die liggies aan die punte van hul towerstawwe gaan uit. Net een deur is oop. Toe hulle daarheen sluip, hoor hulle 'n beweging daaragter; 'n gedempte kreungeluid; en toe 'n diep en harde gespin. Hulle kyk vir oulaas na mekaar, knik vir oulaas.

Toe, met sy towerstaf gereed voor hom, skop Harry die deur wyd oop.

Op 'n manjifieke hemelbed met stowwerige behangsels lê Kromskeen. Hy spin luidkeels toe hy hulle sien. Ron sit op die vloer langs hom. Hy hou sy been, wat teen 'n snaakse hoek uitsteek, in albei hande vas.

Harry en Hermien storm nader.

"Ron – is jy oukei?"

"Waar's die hond?"

"Dis nie 'n hond nie," kreun Ron. Hy kners sy tande van pyn. "Harry, dis 'n lokval –"

“Wat –”

“Hy’s die hond . . . hy’s ’n Animagus . . .”

Ron kyk oor Harry se skouer. Harry draai om. Met ’n klapgeluid maak die man in die skadu’s die deur agter hulle toe.

’n Massa vuil, gekoekte hare hang tot by sy elmboë. As daar nie oë in die diep, donker oogkasse geskitter het nie, kon hy net sowel ’n lyk ge-wees het. Die wasagtige vel span so styf oor sy wangbene dat sy gesig soos ’n kopbeen lyk. Sy geel tande is ontbloot in ’n grynslag. Dit is Sirius Swardt.

“Expelliarmus!” kreun hy en wys met Ron se towerstaf na hulle.

Harry en Hermien se towerstawwe skiet uit hul hande en trek hoog deur die lug, en Swardt vang hulle. Dan gee hy ’n tree nader. Sy oë is vas-genael op Harry.

“Ek het gedink dat jy jou vriend sal kom help,” sê hy hees. Sy stem klink asof hy jare gelede verleer het om te praat. “Jou pa sou dieselfde vir my gedoen het. Dapper van jou om nie ’n onderwyser te gaan haal nie. Ek is dankbaar . . . dit maak alles soveel makliker . . .”

Die skimp oor sy pa weergalm in Harry se ore asof Swardt dit uit-geskreeu het. ’n Kokende haat borrel op in Harry se borskas en laat geen plek vir vrees nie. Vir die eerste keer in sy lewe wil hy sy towerstaf in sy hand hê, nie om homself mee te verdedig nie, maar om aan te val . . . te moor. Sonder dat hy mooi weet wat hy doen, tree hy vorentoe, maar daar is ’n skielike beweging aan weerskante van hom en twee pare hande gryp hom vas en hou hom terug. “Nee, Harry!” sê Hermien in ’n benoude fluisterstem. Ron praat egter met Swardt.

“As jy vir Harry wil doodmaak, sal jy ons ook moet vermoor!” sê hy verwoed, maar die inspanning wat dit hom gekos het om orent te kom, laat hom nog bleker word en hy swaai effens op sy voete.

Iets flikker in Swardt se donker oë.

“Gaan lê,” sê hy sag vir Ron. “Jy sal daardie been net nog seerder maak.”

“Het jy gehoor wat ek sê?” sê Ron floutjies terwyl hy pynlik aan Harry klou in ’n poging om regop te bly. “Jy sal al drie van ons moet doodmaak!”

“Daar gaan vannag net een moord wees,” sê Swardt en sy grynslag verdiep.

“Hoe so?” spoeg Harry terwyl hy sukkel om hom van Ron en Hermien se greep te bevry. “Die vorige keer het jy niks omgee nie! Jy’t vere gevoel vir al daardie Moggels wat jy vermoor het net om vir Pansegrouw in die hande te kry. . . Wat gaan nou aan? Sag geword in Azkaban?”

“Harry!” kerm Hermien. “Hou op!”

“HY HET MY MA EN PA VERRAAI!” bulder Harry en hy breek met ’n geweldige poging uit Hermien en Ron se greep en slinger homself vorentoe –

Hy het heeltemal van toor vergeet, hy het heeltemal vergeet dat hy 'n kort en tengerige dertienjarige is terwyl Swardt 'n lang, uitgegroeide man is. Al wat Harry weet, is dat hy vir Swardt so seer wil maak as wat hy maar kan, en dat dit hom nie in die minste skeel as hy op sy beurt ook moet seerkry nie . . .

Swardt lig sy towerstawwe heeltemal te laat, dalk weens skok dat Harry so 'n dom ding kan waag. Een van Harry se hande vang Swardt se uitgeteerde gewrig en dwing die punte van die towerstawwe weg van hom af; die kneukels van Harry se ander hand tref die kant van Swardt se kop en hulle val agteroor teen die muur –

Hermien skreeu; Ron gil; daar is 'n verblindende lig toe die towerstawwe in Swardt se hand 'n straal vonke die lug in stuur wat Harry se gesig rakelings mis; Harry voel hoe die uitgeteerde arm onder sy vingers wring en draai, maar hy klou verbete vas en moker elke ontblote deel van Swardt met sy ander hand.

Maar Swardt se vry hand het Harry se keel gevind –

“Nee,” grom hy. “Ek het te lank gewag –”

Sy vingers gaan toe en Harry snak na asem, sy bril skeef op sy gesig.

Dan sien hy hoe Hermien se skoen asof van nêrens verskyn. Swardt laat los vir Harry met 'n uitroep van pyn. Ron gooi homself op Swardt se towerstafhand en Harry hoor 'n dowwe gekletter –

Hy sukkel om homself uit die hoop lywe los te woel en sien dan hoe sy eie towerstaf oor die vloer rol. Hy gooi homself soontoe, maar –

“Aarg!”

Kromskeen het homself ook in die stryd gewerp. Hy slaan die naels van sy voorpote diep in Harry se arm; Harry slinger hom weg, maar nou pyl Kromskeen op Harry se towerstaf af –

“NEE, JY GAAN NIE!” gil Harry en skop na Kromskeen sodat die kat spoeg en eenkant toe spring; Harry gryp sy towerstaf en swaai om –

“Gee pad!” skree hy vir Ron en Hermien.

Hy hoef dit nie twee keer te sê nie. Hermien hyg na asem, haar lip bloei, sy raap haar en Ron se towerstawwe op en skarrel eenkant toe. Ron kruip na die hemelbed en val hygend neer, sy bleek gesig is nou 'n groenerige kleur en hy hou sy gebreekte been met albei hande vas.

Swardt lê uitgestrek onder teen die muur. Sy uitgeteerde borskas dein vinnig op en neer terwyl hy vir Harry in die oog hou. Harry stap stadig nader, sy towerstaf is op Swardt se hart gerig.

“Gaan jy my doodmaak, Harry?” fluister hy.

Harry gaan staan oor hom en kyk af na hom. Sy towerstaf wys nog steeds na Swardt se borskas. Swardt se linkeroog is besig om 'n loodblou kleur te word en sy neus is aan die bloei.

“Jy het my ouers se dood veroorsaak,” sê Harry en sy stem skud effens, maar sy towerstafhand is ferm.

Swardt gluur na hom vanuit sy versonke oë.

“Ek ontken dit nie,” sê hy baie sag, “maar as jy die hele storie gehoor het –”

“Die hele storie?” herhaal Harry bo die suising in sy ore. “Jy het hulle aan Woldemort verkoop, dis al wat ek hoef te weet!”

“Jy moet na my luister,” sê Swardt en daar is ’n dringendheid in sy stem. “Jy sal dit altyd berou as jy nie . . . jy verstaan nie . . .”

“Ek verstaan baie beter as wat jy dink,” sê Harry en sy stem skud nog meer as tevore. “Jy het haar nog nooit gehoor nie, het jy? My ma . . . hoe sy probeer keer dat Woldemort my vermoor . . . en dit was jou skuld . . . joune . . .”

Voor hulle nog een verdere woord kan sê, spring iets gemmerkleurigs verby Harry. Dis Kromskeen wat op Swardt se bors wip en reg oor sy hart gaan lê. Swardt knipper sy oë en kyk af na die kat.

“Gee pad,” mompel hy en probeer om vir Kromskeen van hom af te stoot.

Kromskeen slaan sy kloue in Swardt se kleed en roer nie. Hy draai sy lelike, ingedrukte gesig na Harry en tuur met sy groot geel oë na hom. Regs van hom gee Hermien ’n droë snik.

Harry staar na Swardt en na Kromskeen en sy greep op die towerstaf verstyf. Wat maak dit saak as hy die kat ook moet doodmaak? Die ding is kop in een mus met Swardt . . . As hy bereid is om te sterf om Swardt te beskerm, dan het dit niks met Harry uit te waai nie . . . en as Swardt die kat wil red, bewys dit net dat hy meer vir Kromskeen omgee as vir Harry se ouers . . .

Harry lig sy towerstaf. Dit is die oomblik waarop hy gewag het. Dit is die oomblik om sy ma en pa se dood te wreek. Hy gaan vir Swardt vermoor. Hy moet vir Swardt vermoor. Dit is sy kans . . .

Die sekondes stap aan en steeds kan Harry nie roer nie. Sy towerstaf is gereed, Swardt staar na hom met Kromskeen op sy bors. Ron se roggelende asemteue kan van naby die bed af gehoor word; Hermien is doodstil.

Toe word ’n nuwe geluid hoorbaar –

Gedempte voetstappe eggo van onder af deur die vloer – iemand beweeg daar onder.

“ONS IS HIER BO!” skree Hermien skielik. “ONS IS HIER BO – SIRIUS SWARDT – GOU!”

Swardt maak ’n verskrikte beweging sodat Kromskeen amper van sy bors af val; Harry gryp sy towerstaf instinktief stywer vas – *Doen dit nou!* sê ’n stem in sy kop – maar die voetstappe dreun reeds met die trappe op boontoe, en Harry het dit nog steeds nie gedoen nie.

Die kamer se deur bars oop in ’n stortreën van rooi vonke en Harry draai om toe professor Lupin die vertrek binnestorm. Sy gesig is bloed-

loos, sy towerstaf is gereed in die lug. Sy oë flikker oor Ron wat op die vloer lê, oor Hermien wat ineengekrimp langs die deur hurk, na Harry wat daar staan met sy towerstaf op Swardt gerig, en laastens na Swardt wat in 'n bloeiende bondel aan Harry se voete lê.

“Expelliarmus!” skree Lupin.

Harry se towerstaf vlieg opnuut uit sy hand; so ook die twee wat Hermien vashou. Lupin vang hulle behendig en stap dan die kamer binne terwyl hy van Swardt na Kromskeen staar wat nog steeds beskermend op Swardt se bors lê.

Harry voel skielik baie leeg soos hy daar staan. Hy het dit nie gedoen nie. Hy het nie die moed gehad nie. Swardt gaan weer aan die Dementors oorhandig word.

Dan praat Lupin in 'n vreemde stem, 'n stem wat skud van onderdrukte emosie. “Waar is hy, Sirius?”

Harry kyk vinnig na Lupin. Hy weet nie wat Lupin bedoel nie. Van wie praat Lupin? Hy kyk weer terug na Swardt.

Swardt se gesig is heeltemal uitdrukkingloos. Vir 'n rukkie beweeg hy glad nie. Toe, baie stadig, lig hy sy hand en wys reguit na Ron. Harry kyk verward na Ron wat op sy beurt net so verwilderd lyk.

“Maar dan . . .” mompel Lupin terwyl hy so stip na Swardt kyk dat dit lyk asof hy sy gedagtes probeer lees, “. . . hoekom het hy hom nog nie voorheen gewys nie? Behalwe –” Lupin se oë rek skielik asof hy iets anderkant Swardt gesien het, iets wat hulle nie kan sien nie, “– behalwe as dit hy was . . . as julle geruil het . . . sonder om vir my te sê?”

Swardt knik baie stadig sonder dat sy versonke oë Lupin se gesig verlaat.

“Professor Lupin,” val Harry hom hard in die rede, “wat gaan aan –?”

Hy maak die sin egter nie klaar nie, want wat hy sien laat die woorde in sy keel stol. Lupin het sy towerstaf laat sak. Die volgende oomblik is hy langs Swardt; hy gryp sy hand en trek hom orent sodat Kromskeen op die vloer beland. Toe omhels hy vir Swardt soos 'n broer.

Harry voel hoe alles om hom in duie stort.

“EK GLO DIT NIE!” skree Hermien.

Lupin laat vir Swardt los en draai na haar. Sy het haarself van die vloer af opgelig en wys met wilde oë na Lupin, “Jy – jy –”

“Hermien –”

“– jy en hy!”

“Hermien, bedaar –”

“Ek het vir niemand gesê nie!” gil Hermien. “Ek het jou beskerm –”

“Hermien, luister asseblief na my!” skreeu Lupin. “Ek kan verduidelik –”

Harry voel hoe hy bewe, nie van vrees nie, maar van 'n hernude vlaag van woede.

“Ek het jou vertrou,” skreeu hy vir Lupin en sy stem is onvas, “en die hele tyd was jy sy vriend!”

“Julle is verkeerd,” sê Lupin. “Vir twaalf jaar was ek nie Sirius se vriend nie, maar ek is nou . . . Laat ek verduidelik . . .”

“NEE!” gil Hermien, “Harry, moet hom nie vertrou nie, hy’t vir Swardt gehelp om in die kasteel te kom, hy wil jou ook dood hê – hy’s ’n weerwolf!”

Daar heers ’n oorverdowende stilte. Almal se oë is nou op Lupin wat merkwaardig kalm, hoewel bleek, lyk.

“Nie heeltemal jou gewone standaard nie, Hermien,” sê hy. “Ek is bevrees net een uit drie. Ek het nie vir Sirius gehelp om in die kasteel te kom nie en ek wil beslis nie hê dat Harry dood moet wees nie . . .” ’n Vreemde siddering speel oor sy gesig. “Maar ek kan nie ontken dat ek ’n weerwolf is nie.”

Ron wend ’n heldhaftige poging aan om op te staan, maar val met ’n kreun van pyn terug op die grond. Lupin lyk besorg en wil-wil na hom gaan, maar Ron sê hortend, “Bly weg van my af, jou weerwolf!”

Lupin steek in sy spore vas. Toe, met ooglopende inspanning, draai hy na Hermien en sê, “Van wanneer af weet jy?”

“Al lankal,” fluister Hermien. “Van toe ek professor Snerp se opstel geskryf het . . .”

“Hy sal in sy noppies wees,” sê Lupin koel. “Hy het julle daardie opstel laat doen in die hoop dat iemand sal raai wat my simptome beteken. Het jy na die maankaarte gekyk en gesien dat ek altyd met volmaan siek is? Of het jy besef dat die Boggart in ’n maan verander het toe dit my gesien het?”

“Albei,” sê Hermien sag.

Lupin dwing ’n laggie oor sy lippe.

“Jy’s die slimste heks van jou ouderdom wat ek nog ooit teëgekom het, Hermien.”

“Nee, ek is nie,” fluister Hermien. “As ek net ’n bietjie slimmer was, het ek vir almal vertel wat jy regtig is!”

“Maar hulle weet reeds,” sê Lupin. “Ten minste, die personeel weet.”

“Dompeldorius het jou aangestel terwyl hy weet dat jy ’n weerwolf is?” sê Ron en snak na asem. “Is hy mal?”

“Van die personeel het ook so gedink,” sê Lupin. “Hy moes baie hard werk om party van die onderwysers te oortuig dat ek betroubaar is –”

“EN HY HET ’N FOUT GEMAAK!” gil Harry. “JY HELP HOM NOG DIE HELE TYD!” Hy wys na Swardt wat op die hemelbed neergeval het met sy gesig in een bewende hand. Kromskeen spring langs hom op en gaan sit op sy skoot en spin. Ron probeer homself van hulle af wegsleep.

“Ek het nie vir Sirius gehelp nie,” sê Lupin. “As julle my net ’n kans sal gee, dan sal ek verduidelik. Kyk –”

Hy gooi Harry, Ron en Hermien se towerstafwe na hulle toe. Heeltemal uit die veld geslaan, vang Harry dit.

“Toe nou,” sê Lupin terwyl hy sy eie towerstaf in sy gordel steek. “Julle is gewapen, ons is nie. Sal julle nou luister?”

Harry weet nie wat om te dink nie. Is dit ’n set?

“As jy hom nie gehelp het nie,” sê hy met ’n woedende blik in Swardt se rigting, “hoe het jy geweet dat hy hier is?”

“Die kaart,” sê Lupin. “Die Plunderaar se Kaart. Ek was in my kantoor besig om dit te bestudeer –”

“Dan weet jy hoe dit werk?” vra Harry agterdogtig.

“Natuurlik weet ek hoe dit werk,” sê Lupin en hy waai ongeduldig met sy hand. “Ek het gehelp om dit te skryf. Ek is Maantjie – dit was my vriende se bynaam vir my toe ek op skool was.”

“Jy het gehelp om dit te skryf –?”

“Die belangrike ding is dat ek dit vanaand baie fyn dopgehou het, want ek het ’n gevoel gehad dat jy en Ron en Hermien dit dalk sal waag om uit die kasteel te glip om vir Hagrid te gaan kuier voor sy Hippogrief tereggestel word. En ek was reg, of hoe?”

Hy loop op en af terwyl hy na hulle kyk. Klein stofdampies staan om sy voete.

“Jy het waarskynlik jou pa se ou mantel gedra, Harry –”

“Hoe weet jy van die mantel?”

“Die aantal kere dat ek vir James daaronder sien verdwyn het . . .” sê Lupin en waai weer ongeduldig met sy hand. “Die punt is dat selfs al dra jy die onsigbaarheidsmantel, wys jy nog steeds op die Plunderaar se Kaart. Ek het gesien hoe julle oor die terrein stap en by Hagrid se hut ingaan. Twintig minute later het julle Hagrid verlaat en teruggestap kasteel toe. Hierdie keer was daar iemand by julle.”

“Wat?” sê Harry. “Nee, daar was nie!”

“Ek kon my oë nie glo nie,” sê Lupin wat nog steeds op en af loop en hom nie aan Harry se onderbreking steur nie. “Ek het gedink daar moet ’n fout met die kaart wees. Hoe kon hy skielik by julle wees?”

“Daar was niemand by ons nie!” sê Harry.

“Toe sien ek nog ’n kolletjie wat vinnig op julle afpyl en ‘Sirius Swardt’ gemerk is . . . Ek sien hoe hy in julle vasloop en hoe hy twee van julle na die Woelige Wilg sleep –”

“Een van ons!” sê Ron vererg.

“Nee, Ron,” sê Lupin. “Twee van julle.”

Nou staan hy stil en sy oë speel oor Ron.

“Dink jy ek kan ’n bietjie na daardie rot van jou kyk?” vra hy, bedaard.

“Hoekom?” sê Ron. “Wat het Skille hiermee uit te waai?”

“Alles,” sê Lupin. “Mag ek hom dalk sien?”

Ron aarsel, toe steek hy sy hand onder sy kleed in. Toe Skille verskyn,

spartel hy so erg dat Ron hom aan sy lang, kaal stert moet gryp om te keer dat hy ontsnap. Kromskeen staan regop op Swardt se skoot en maak 'n sagte sissgeluid.

Lupin beweeg nader aan Ron. Dit lyk asof hy sy asem inhou terwyl hy stip na Skille staar.

"Wat?" sê Ron weer. Hy hou Skille dig teen hom en hy lyk bang. "Wat het my rot met dit alles uit te waai?"

"Dis nie 'n rot nie," sê Sirius Swardt skielik in 'n skor stem.

"Wat bedoel jy – natuurlik is hy 'n rot –"

"Nee, hy is nie," sê Lupin sag. "Hy's 'n towenaar."

"'n Animagus," sê Swardt, "by name, Pieter Parsegrouw."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN



MOONY, WORMTAIL, PADFOOT, AND PRONGS

It took a few seconds for the absurdity of this statement to sink in. Then Ron voiced what Harry was thinking.

“You’re both mental.”

“Ridiculous!” said Hermione faintly.

“Peter Pettigrew’s *dead!*” said Harry. “*He* killed him twelve years ago!” He pointed at Black, whose face twitched convulsively.

“I meant to,” he growled, his yellow teeth bared, “but little Peter got the better of me ... not this time, though!”

And Crookshanks was thrown to the floor as Black lunged at Scabbers; Ron yelled with pain as Black’s weight fell on his broken leg.

“Sirius, NO!” Lupin yelled, launching himself forwards and dragging Black away from Ron again. “WAIT! You can’t do it just

like that — they need to understand — we've got to explain —”

“We can explain afterwards!” snarled Black, trying to throw Lupin off. One hand was still clawing the air as it tried to reach Scabbers, who was squealing like a piglet, scratching Ron's face and neck as he tried to escape.

“They've — got — a — right — to — know — everything!” Lupin panted, still trying to restrain Black. “Ron's kept him as a pet! There are parts of it even I don't understand! And Harry — you owe Harry the truth, Sirius!”

Black stopped struggling, though his hollowed eyes were still fixed on Scabbers, who was clamped tightly under Ron's bitten, scratched, and bleeding hands.

“All right, then,” Black said, without taking his eyes off the rat. “Tell them whatever you like. But make it quick, Remus. I want to commit the murder I was imprisoned for. . . .”

“You're nutters, both of you,” said Ron shakily, looking round at Harry and Hermione for support. “I've had enough of this. I'm off.”

He tried to heave himself up on his good leg, but Lupin raised his wand again, pointing it at Scabbers.

“You're going to hear me out, Ron,” he said quietly. “Just keep a tight hold on Peter while you listen.”

“HE'S NOT PETER, HE'S SCABBERS!” Ron yelled, trying to force the rat back into his front pocket, but Scabbers was fighting too hard; Ron swayed and overbalanced, and Harry caught him and pushed him back down to the bed. Then, ignoring Black, Harry turned to Lupin.

“There were witnesses who saw Pettigrew die,” he said. “A

whole street full of them . . .”

“They didn’t see what they thought they saw!” said Black savagely, still watching Scabbers struggling in Ron’s hands.

“Everyone thought Sirius killed Peter,” said Lupin, nodding. “I believed it myself — until I saw the map tonight. Because the Marauder’s Map never lies . . . Peter’s alive. Ron’s holding him, Harry.”

Harry looked down at Ron, and as their eyes met, they agreed, silently: Black and Lupin were both out of their minds. Their story made no sense whatsoever. How could Scabbers be Peter Pettigrew? Azkaban must have unhinged Black after all — but why was Lupin playing along with him?

Then Hermione spoke, in a trembling, would-be calm sort of voice, as though trying to will Professor Lupin to talk sensibly.

“But Professor Lupin . . . Scabbers can’t be Pettigrew . . . it just can’t be true, you know it can’t . . .”

“Why can’t it be true?” Lupin said calmly, as though they were in class, and Hermione had simply spotted a problem in an experiment with grindylows.

“Because . . . because people would *know* if Peter Pettigrew had been an Animagus. We did Animagi in class with Professor McGonagall. And I looked them up when I did my homework — the Ministry of Magic keeps tabs on witches and wizards who can become animals; there’s a register showing what animal they become, and their markings and things . . . and I went and looked Professor McGonagall up on the register, and there have been only seven Animagi this century, and Pettigrew’s name wasn’t on the list

Harry had barely had time to marvel inwardly at the effort Hermione put into her homework, when Lupin started to laugh.

“Right again, Hermione!” he said. “But the Ministry never knew that there used to be three unregistered Animagi running around Hogwarts.”

“If you’re going to tell them the story, get a move on, Remus,” snarled Black, who was still watching Scabbers’s every desperate move. “I’ve waited twelve years, I’m not going to wait much longer.”

“All right . . . but you’ll need to help me, Sirius,” said Lupin, “I only know how it began . . .”

Lupin broke off. There had been a loud creak behind him. The bedroom door had opened of its own accord. All five of them stared at it. Then Lupin strode toward it and looked out into the landing.

“No one there . . .”

“This place is haunted!” said Ron.

“It’s not,” said Lupin, still looking at the door in a puzzled way. “The Shrieking Shack was never haunted. . . . The screams and howls the villagers used to hear were made by me.”

He pushed his graying hair out of his eyes, thought for a moment, then said, “That’s where all of this starts — with my becoming a werewolf. None of this could have happened if I hadn’t been bitten . . . and if I hadn’t been so foolhardy. . . .”

He looked sober and tired. Ron started to interrupt, but Hermione said, “Shh!” She was watching Lupin very intently.

“I was a very small boy when I received the bite. My parents tried everything, but in those days there was no cure. The potion that

Professor Snape has been making for me is a very recent discovery. It makes me safe, you see. As long as I take it in the week preceding the full moon, I keep my mind when I transform. . . . I am able to curl up in my office, a harmless wolf, and wait for the moon to wane again.

“Before the Wolfsbane Potion was discovered, however, I became a fully fledged monster once a month. It seemed impossible that I would be able to come to Hogwarts. Other parents weren’t likely to want their children exposed to me.

“But then Dumbledore became headmaster, and he was sympathetic. He said that as long as we took certain precautions, there was no reason I shouldn’t come to school. . . .” Lupin sighed, and looked directly at Harry. “I told you, months ago, that the Whomping Willow was planted the year I came to Hogwarts. The truth is that it was planted *because* I came to Hogwarts. This house” — Lupin looked miserably around the room — “the tunnel that leads to it — they were built for my use. Once a month, I was smuggled out of the castle, into this place, to transform. The tree was placed at the tunnel mouth to stop anyone coming across me while I was dangerous.”

Harry couldn’t see where this story was going, but he was listening raptly all the same. The only sound apart from Lupin’s voice was Scabbers’s frightened squeaking.

“My transformations in those days were — were terrible. It is very painful to turn into a werewolf. I was separated from humans to bite, so I bit and scratched myself instead. The villagers heard the noise and the screaming and thought they were hearing particularly violent spirits. Dumbledore encouraged the rumor. . . . Even now, when the

house has been silent for years, the villagers don't dare approach it. . . .

"But apart from my transformations, I was happier than I had ever been in my life. For the first time ever, I had friends, three great friends. Sirius Black . . . Peter Pettigrew . . . and, of course, your father, Harry — James Potter.

"Now, my three friends could hardly fail to notice that I disappeared once a month. I made up all sorts of stories. I told them my mother was ill, and that I had to go home to see her. . . . I was terrified they would desert me the moment they found out what I was. But of course, they, like you, Hermione, worked out the truth. . . .

"And they didn't desert me at all. Instead, they did something for me that would make my transformations not only bearable, but the best times of my life. They became Animagi."

"My dad too?" said Harry, astounded.

"Yes, indeed," said Lupin. "It took them the best part of three years to work out how to do it. Your father and Sirius here were the cleverest students in the school, and lucky they were, because the Animagus transformation can go horribly wrong — one reason the Ministry keeps a close watch on those attempting to do it. Peter needed all the help he could get from James and Sirius. Finally, in our fifth year, they managed it. They could each turn into a different animal at will."

"But how did that help you?" said Hermione, sounding puzzled.

"They couldn't keep me company as humans, so they kept me company as animals," said Lupin. "A werewolf is only a danger to people. They sneaked out of the castle every month under James's

Invisibility Cloak. They transformed . . . Peter, as the smallest, could slip beneath the Willow's attacking branches and touch the knot that freezes it. They would then slip down the tunnel and join me. Under their influence, I became less dangerous. My body was still wolfish, but my mind seemed to become less so while I was with them."

"Hurry up, Remus," snarled Black, who was still watching Scabbers with a horrible sort of hunger on his face.

"I'm getting there, Sirius, I'm getting there . . . well, highly exciting possibilities were open to us now that we could all transform. Soon we were leaving the Shrieking Shack and roaming the school grounds and the village by night. Sirius and James transformed into such large animals, they were able to keep a werewolf in check. I doubt whether any Hogwarts students ever found out more about the Hogwarts grounds and Hogsmeade than we did. . . . And that's how we came to write the Marauder's Map, and sign it with our nicknames. Sirius is Padfoot. Peter is Wormtail. James was Prongs."

"What sort of animal — ?" Harry began, but Hermione cut him off.

"That was still really dangerous! Running around in the dark with a werewolf! What if you'd given the others the slip, and bitten somebody?"

"A thought that still haunts me," said Lupin heavily. "And there were near misses, many of them. We laughed about them afterwards. We were young, thoughtless — carried away with our own cleverness.

"I sometimes felt guilty about betraying Dumbledore's trust, of course . . . he had admitted me to Hogwarts when no other headmaster would have done so, and he had no idea I was breaking

the rules he had set down for my own and others' safety. He never knew I had led three fellow students into becoming Animagi illegally. But I always managed to forget my guilty feelings every time we sat down to plan our next month's adventure. And I haven't changed. . . .”

Lupin's face had hardened, and there was self-disgust in his voice. “All this year, I have been battling with myself, wondering whether I should tell Dumbledore that Sirius was an Animagus. But I didn't do it. Why? Because I was too cowardly. It would have meant admitting that I'd betrayed his trust while I was at school, admitting that I'd led others along with me . . . and Dumbledore's trust has meant everything to me. He let me into Hogwarts as a boy, and he gave me a job when I have been shunned all my adult life, unable to find paid work because of what I am. And so I convinced myself that Sirius was getting into the school using Dark Arts he learned from Voldemort, that being an Animagus had nothing to do with it. . . . so, in a way, Snape's been right about me all along.”

“Snape?” said Black harshly, taking his eyes off Scabbers for the first time in minutes and looking up at Lupin. “What's Snape got to do with it?”

“He's here, Sirius,” said Lupin heavily. “He's teaching here as well.” He looked up at Harry, Ron, and Hermione.

“Professor Snape was at school with us. He fought very hard against my appointment to the Defense Against the Dark Arts job. He has been telling Dumbledore all year that I am not to be trusted. He has his reasons . . . you see, Sirius here played a trick on him which nearly killed him, a trick which involved me —”

Black made a derisive noise.

“It served him right,” he sneered. “Sneaking around, trying to find out what we were up to . . . hoping he could get us expelled. . . .”

“Severus was very interested in where I went every month,” Lupin told Harry, Ron, and Hermione. “We were in the same year, you know, and we — er — didn’t like each other very much. He especially disliked James. Jealous, I think, of James’s talent on the Quidditch field . . . anyway, Snape had seen me crossing the grounds with Madam Pomfrey one evening as she led me toward the Whomping Willow to transform. Sirius thought it would be — er — amusing, to tell Snape all he had to do was prod the knot on the tree trunk with a long stick, and he’d be able to get in after me. Well, of course, Snape tried it — if he’d got as far as this house, he’d have met a fully grown werewolf — but your father, who’d heard what Sirius had done, went after Snape and pulled him back, at great risk to his life . . . Snape glimpsed me, though, at the end of the tunnel. He was forbidden by Dumbledore to tell anybody, but from that time on he knew what I was. . . .”

“So that’s why Snape doesn’t like you,” said Harry slowly, “because he thought you were in on the joke?”

“That’s right,” sneered a cold voice from the wall behind Lupin.

Severus Snape was pulling off the Invisibility Cloak, his wand pointing directly at Lupin.

Maantjie, Wurmstert, Kussingvoet en Gaffel

Dit neem 'n hele rukkie vir hierdie belaglike stelling om in te sink. Toe sê Ron presies wat Harry ook dink.

“Julle is albei stapelgek.”

“Belaglik!” sê Hermien floutjies.

“Pieter Pansegrouw is dood!” sê Harry. “Hy het hom twaalf jaar gelede vermoor!”

Hy wys na Swardt wie se gesig spasmodies saamtrek.

“Ek wou,” grom hy en sy geel tande is ontbloot, “maar klein Pietertjie was te vinnig vir my . . . maar nie hierdie keer nie!”

Kromskeen trek grond toe, want Swardt het homself na Skille toe geslinger; Ron gil van pyn toe Swardt met sy volle gewig op sy gebreekte been val.

“Sirius, NEE!” gil Lupin terwyl hy nader spring en vir Swardt van Ron afsleep. “WAG! Jy kan dit nie op hierdie manier doen nie – hulle moet verstaan – ons moet verduidelik –”

“Ons kan later verduidelik!” snou Swardt en probeer vir Lupin afgooi terwyl een hand nog in die lug grawe soos hy by Skille probeer kom. Skille skree soos 'n klein varkie en krap Ron se gesig en nek in 'n poging om weg te kom.

“Hulle – het – 'n – reg – om – alles – te – weet!” sê Lupin hortend terwyl hy sukkel om vir Swardt teë te hou. “Hy is Ron se troeteldier! Daar is dinge wat selfs ek nie verstaan nie! En Harry – jy is die waarheid aan Harry verskuldig, Sirius!”

Swardt het ophou worstel, maar sy hol oë is nog steeds vasgenael op Skille wat styf in Ron se gebyte, gekrapte en bloeiende hande vasgehou word.

“Goed dan,” sê Swardt sonder om sy oë van die rot af te neem. “Vertel vir hulle net wat jy wil. Maar skud op, Remus. Ek wil daardie moord waarvoor ek gevange geneem is, nou pleeg . . .”

“Julle is al twee mal,” sê Ron bewurig en kyk na Harry en Hermien vir ondersteuning. “Ek het genoeg hiervan gehad, ek loop.”

Hy probeer homself op sy gesonde been hys, maar Lupin lig sy towerstaf en rig dit op Skille.

“Jy gaan luister na wat ek te sê het, Ron,” sê hy sag. “Sorg net dat jy vir Pieter styf vashou terwyl ek praat.”

“HY’S NIE PIETER NIE, HY’S SKILLE!” gil Ron en probeer weer om die rot in sy sak te druk, maar Skille sit hom te woest. Ron verloor sy balans en val, maar Harry vang hom en stoot hom na die bed toe. Toe, terwyl hy vir Swardt ignoreer, draai Harry na Lupin.

“Daar was getuies wat gesien het hoe Pansegrouw sterf,” sê hy. “’n Hele straat vol van hulle . . .”

“Hulle het nie gesien wat hulle gedink het hulle sien nie!” sê Swardt verwoed, sy oë nog steeds op Skille wat in Ron se greep spartel.

“Almal het gedink dat Sirius vir Pieter doodgemaak het,” sê Lupin en knik. “Ek het dit ook geglo – tot ek vannag na die kaart gekyk het. Die Plunderaar se Kaart kan nie lieg nie . . . Pieter lewe. Ron hou hom vas, Harry.”

Harry kyk na Ron en toe hul oë ontmoet, stem hulle stilweg saam: Swardt en Lupin is albei heeltemal kranksinnig. Hul verhaal maak hoe-genaamd nie sin nie. Hoe kan Skille Pieter Pansegrouw wil wees? Swardt moet in Azkaban heeltemal van sy sinne af gegaan het – maar hoekom speel Lupin in sy hande?

Toe sê Hermien bewerig, maar soos iemand wat hard probeer om kalm te klink, nes of sy vir professor Lupin probeer dwing om redelik te wees: “Maar professor Lupin . . . Skille kan nie Pansegrouw wees nie . . . Dit kan net nie waar wees nie, u weet dit tog . . .”

“Hoekom kan dit nie waar wees nie?” sê Lupin bedaard, asof hulle in die klas is en Hermien bloot ’n probleem in ’n eksperiment met ’n Grindeloog opgemerk het.

“Want . . . want mense sal mos weet as Pieter Pansegrouw ’n Animagus was. Ons het Animagi in die klas gedoen, by professor McGonagall. Toe ek my huiswerk gedoen het, het ek oor hulle opgelees – die Ministerie weet watter hekse en tovenaars diere kan word; daar’s ’n register wat wys watter diere hulle word, en die merke op hulle, en so aan . . . Ek het professor McGonagall se naam op die register gesien, en daar was in hierdie een net sewe Animagi en Pansegrouw se naam is nie eens op die lys nie –”

Harry het kwalik tyd om homself te verwonder aan die moeite wat Hermien met haar huiswerk doen, want Lupin het begin lag.

“Weer reg, Hermien!” sê hy. “Die Ministerie weet egter nie dat daar drie ongeregistreerde Animagi by Hogwarts was nie.”

“As jy die storie gaan vertel, dan moet jy opskud, Remus,” grom Swardt, wat elke beweging wat Skille maak nog steeds fyn dophou. “Ek wag al twaalf jaar, ek kan nie veel langer wag nie.”

“Goed . . . maar jy moet my help, Sirius,” sê Lupin. “Al wat ek weet, is hoe dit begin het . . .”

Lupin bly stil. Daar was ’n harde kraakgeluid agter hom. Die slaap-

kamer se deur het asof vanself oopgeswaai. Al vyf van hulle staan daarna. Toe stap Lupin vorentoe en kyk uit op die trappoortaal.

“Niemand nie . . .”

“Dit spook in hierdie plek!” sê Ron.

“Nee, dit spook nie,” sê Lupin, wat nog steeds ietwat verward na die deur kyk. “Dit het nog nooit in die Kermende Krot gespook nie . . . Die krote en gekree wat die mense van die dorp gehoor het, was ek.”

Hy stoot sy effense gryns hare uit sy oë, dink vir ’n paar oomblikke en sê, “Dis waar alles begin het – toe ek ’n weerwolf geword het. Niks hiervan sou gebeur het as ek nie gebyt is nie . . . en as ek nie so onbesonne was nie . . .”

Hy lyk ontugter en moeg. Ron wil-wil hom in die rede val, maar Hermien sê, “Sj!” terwyl sy vir Lupin stip dophou.

“Ek was ’n baie klein seuntjie toe ek gebyt is. My ouers het alles probeer, maar in daardie dae was daar geen teenmiddel nie. Die Towerdrankie wat professor Snerp vir my maak, is ’n baie onlangse uitvindsel. Dit maak my onskadelik, sien. Solank ek dit in die week voor volmaan neem, behou ek my rede wanneer ek transformeer . . . Ek is daartoe in staat om bloot in my kantoor op te krul, ’n skadelose wolf, en te wag tot die maan weer kleiner word.

“Voor die uitvinding van die Wolfsklou-towerdrankie het ek elke maand in ’n monster verander. Dit het gelyk asof ek nooit na Hogwarts sou kon kom nie. Ander ouers sou nie wou hê dat hul kinders aan my blootgestel moet wees nie.

“Toe het Dompeldorius skoolhoof geword, en hy was simpatiek. Hy het gesê dat mits ons sekere voorsorgmaatreëls tref, daar geen rede is waarom ek nie skool toe kan kom nie . . .” Lupin sug en kyk vir Harry in die oë. “Ek het maande gelede vir jou gesê dat die Woelige Wilg in die jaar dat ek Hogwarts toe gekom het, geplant is. Die waarheid is egter dat dit geplant is juis omdat ek Hogwarts toe gekom het. Hierdie huis –” Lupin kyk mistroostig om hom, “– die tunnel wat hierheen lei – is vir my gebruik gebou. Een keer elke maand is ek uit die kasteel na hierdie plek gesmokkel om te kan transformeer. Die boom is voor die ingang geplant om te keer dat enigiemand op my afkom terwyl ek gevaarlik is.”

Harry kan sien waarop die storie afstuur, maar hy luister nog steeds met gespanne aandag. Die enigste geluid behalwe Lupin se stem is Skille se beangste gepiep.

“In daardie dae was my transformasies – verskriklik. Dit is uiters pynlik om in ’n weerwolf te verander. Ek is weggehou van mense wat ek kon byt, dus het ek myself gebyt en gekrap. Die mense van die dorp het die geraas gehoor en gedink dat hier besonder gewelddadige geeste woon. Dompeldorius het die gerugte aangemoedig . . . Selfs noudat die huis al jare stil is, is die dorpenaars nog steeds bang om hierheen te kom . . .”

“Buiten die transformasies was ek gelukkiger as wat ek nog ooit in my lewe was. Vir die eerste keer het ek vriende gehad: drie goeie vriende: Sirius Swardt . . . Pieter Pansegrouw . . . en natuurlik jou pa, Harry – James Potter.

“Hierdie drie vriende kon nie anders as om op te let dat ek een keer per maand verdwyn nie. Ek het allerhande verskottings uitgedink. Ek het vir hulle vertel dat my ma sieklik is en dat ek huis toe moes gaan om haar te sien . . . Ek was tot die dood toe benoud dat hulle my sal verwerp die oomblik dat hulle uitvind wat ek werklik is. Maar soos jy, Hermien, het hulle agter die waarheid gekom . . .

“Hulle het my nie verwerp nie. Pleks daarvan het hulle iets gedoen wat my transformasies nie net draaglik gemaak het nie, maar die beste deel van my lewe. Hulle het Animagi geword.”

“My pa ook?” sê Harry verstom.

“Inderdaad, ja,” sê Lupin. “Dit het hulle meer as drie jaar geneem om uit te werk hoe om dit te doen. Jou pa en Sirius was die slimste studente in die skool, en dit was ’n geluiskoot, want die Animagus-transformasie kan gruwelik skeef loop – een rede waarom die Ministerie ’n ogie hou op diegene wat dit probeer doen. Pieter het al die hulp wat James en Sirius hom kon gee nodig gehad. Uiteindelik, in ons vyfde jaar, het hulle dit reggekry. Hulle kon elkeen vryelik in ’n dier verander.”

“Maar hoe het dit u gehelp?” sê Hermien en sy klink skepties.

“As mense kon hulle my nie geselskap hou nie,” sê Lupin, “dus het hulle my as diere besoek. ’n Weerwolf is net vir mense ’n gevaar. Hulle het elke maand onder James se onsigbaarheidsmantel uit die kasteel geglip. Hulle het getransformeer . . . Pieter, die kleinste, het onder die Wilg se takke ingeglip en die kwas wat dit laat vries, aangeraak. Dan het hulle deur die tunnel na my toe gesluip. Onder hul invloed was ek baie minder gevaarlik. My liggaam was nog steeds dié van ’n wolf, maar my gees was minder so terwyl ek by hulle was.”

“Opskud, Remus,” snou Swardt, wat nog steeds met ’n aaklige honger soort uitdrukking na Skille staar.

“Ek is besig, Sirius, ek is besig . . . Wel, uiters opwindende dinge het vir ons moontlik geword toe hulle al drie kon transformeer. Ons het die Kermende Krot verlaat en snags op die skoolterrein en in Hogsmeade rondgesluip. Sirius en James het in sulke groot diere verander dat hulle ’n weerwolf kon beheer. Ek twyfel of enige student by Hogwarts ooit meer oor die skool uitgevind het as ons . . . Dit is hoe ons die Plunderaar se Kaart geskryf en dit met ons byname geteker het. Sirius is Kussingvoet. Pieter is Wurmstert. James was Gaffel.”

“Watter soort dier was –” begin Harry, maar Hermien val hom in die rede.

“Dit was regtig gevaarlik! Om so in die donker saam met ’n weerwolf

rond te hardloop! Wat as u die ander ontglim en iemand gebyt het?"

"Dis 'n gedagte wat vandag nog by my spook," sê Lupin swaarmoedig. "En daar was noue ontkomings, baie van hulle. Ons het agterna daaroor gelag. Ons was jonk, sorgeloos – meegevoer deur ons eie slimhede.

"Ek het soms skuldig gevoel dat ek Dompeldorius se vertrouwe so misbruik het. . . Hy het my by Hogwarts toegelaat terwyl geen ander skoolhoof dit sou doen nie, en hy het nie 'n idee gehad dat ek die reëls wat hy vir my eie en ander mense se veiligheid opgestel het, so oortree het nie. Hy het nooit vermoed dat drie van my medestudente ter wille van my onwettig Animagi geword het nie. Ek het egter altyd daarin geslaag om my skuldgevoelens te vergeet wanneer ons die volgende maand se avontuur beplan het. En ek het nie verander nie. . ."

Lupin se gesig word hard en daar is selfminagting in sy stem. "Hierdie hele jaar worstel ek al met myself, wonder ek of ek vir Dompeldorius moet vertel dat Sirius 'n Animagus is. Ek het dit egter nie gedoen nie. Hoekom nie? Omdat ek te lamsakkig is. Dit sal beteken dat ek sal moet erken dat ek sy vertrouwe nie werd was toe ek hier op skool was nie, dat ek sal moet erken dat ek andere verlei het. . . en dat Dompeldorius se vertrouwe niks vir my beteken het nie. Hy het my as seun in Hogwarts toegelaat, hy het vir my 'n werk aangebied, terwyl ek in my hele lewe as volwassene nie 'n werk kon kry nie – oor wat ek is. Ek het myself eerder oortuig dat Sirius toegang tot die skool het met behulp van donker kunste wat hy by Woldemort geleer het, dat die feit dat hy 'n Animagus is niks daarmee te doen het nie. . . Op 'n manier was Snerp dus nog die hele tyd reg oor my."

"Snerp?" sê Swardt heftig en kyk vir 'n oomblik weg van Skille om na Lupin te staar. "Wat het Snerp hiermee uit te waai?"

"Hy is hier, Sirius," sê Lupin swaarmoedig. "Hy is een van die onderwysers." Hy draai na Harry, Ron en Hermien.

"Professor Snerp was op skool saam met ons. Hy het baie hard teen my aanstelling in die pos van Verdediging teen die Donker Kunste baklei. Hy vertel nog die hele jaar vir Dompeldorius dat ek nie betroubaar is nie. Hy het sy redes. . . Julle sien, Sirius het hom 'n poets gebak wat amper sy lewe gekos het, 'n poets waarby ek betrokke was –"

Swardt maak 'n minagtende geluid.

"Sy verdiende loon," sê hy smalend. "Sluip oral rond, probeer uitsnuffel waarmee ons besig is. . . hoop ons word geskors. . ."

"Severus was baie geïnteresseerd in waarheen ek elke maand gaan," vertel Lupin vir Harry, Ron en Hermien. "Ons was in dieselfde jaar, weet julle, en ons – h'm – het nie baie van mekaar gehou nie. Hy het veral nie van James gehou nie. Jaloers, dink ek, op James se talent op die Kwid-diekveld. . . In elk geval, Snerp het gesien hoe ek een aand saam met Madame Pomfrey oor die terrein stap toe sy my na die Woelige Wilg ge-

neem het om te transformeer. Sirius het gedink dat dit – h'm – amusant sal wees om vir Snerp te sê dat hy net die kwas op die boom met 'n lang stok moet aanraak, en dat hy dan agter my sal kan aankom. Wel, natuurlik het Snerp dit probeer – as hy die huis gehaal het, sou hy hom in 'n volgroeide weerwolf vasgeloop het – maar jou pa het gehoor wat Sirius gedoen het. Hy het vir Snerp agterna gesit en hom weggesleep, homself aan groot gevaar blootgestel . . . Snerp het egter 'n glimp van my daar aan die punt van die tunnel gekry. Dompeldorius het hom verbied om daaroor te praat, maar van daardie dag af het hy geweet wat ek is . . . ”

“Dis dan hoekom Snerp nie van u hou nie,” sê Harry stadig, “hy't gedink dat u deel van die poets was?”

“Heeltemal reg,” sê 'n snerpend koue stem agter Lupin.

Severus Snerp haal die onsigbaarheidsmantel af en sy towerstaf is vol op Lupin gerig.

CHAPTER NINETEEN



THE SERVANT OF LORD VOLDEMORT

Hermione screamed! Black leapt to his feet. Harry jumped as though he'd received a huge electric shock.

"I found this at the base of the Whomping Willow," said Snape, throwing the Cloak aside, careful to keep his wand pointing directly at Lupin's chest. "Very useful, Potter, I thank you. . . ."

Snape was slightly breathless, but his face was full of suppressed triumph. "You're wondering, perhaps, how I knew you were here?" he said, his eyes glittering. "I've just been to your office, Lupin. You forgot to take your potion tonight, so I took a gobletful along. And very lucky I did. . . . lucky for me, I mean. Lying on your desk was a certain map. One glance at it told me all I needed to know. I saw you running along this passageway and out of sight."

“Severus —” Lupin began, but Snape overrode him.

“I’ve told the headmaster again and again that you’re helping your old friend Black into the castle, Lupin, and here’s the proof. Not even I dreamed you would have the nerve to use this old place as your hideout —”

“Severus, you’re making a mistake,” said Lupin urgently. “You haven’t heard everything — I can explain — Sirius is not here to kill Harry —”

“Two more for Azkaban tonight,” said Snape, his eyes now gleaming fanatically. “I shall be interested to see how Dumbledore takes this. . . . He was quite convinced you were harmless, you know, Lupin . . . a *tame* werewolf —”

“You fool,” said Lupin softly. “Is a schoolboy grudge worth putting an innocent man back inside Azkaban?”

BANG! Thin, snakelike cords burst from the end of Snape’s wand and twisted themselves around Lupin’s mouth, wrists, and ankles; he overbalanced and fell to the floor, unable to move. With a roar of rage, Black started toward Snape, but Snape pointed his wand straight between Black’s eyes.

“Give me a reason,” he whispered. “Give me a reason to do it, and I swear I will.”

Black stopped dead. It would have been impossible to say which face showed more hatred.

Harry stood there, paralyzed, not knowing what to do or whom to believe. He glanced around at Ron and Hermione. Ron looked just as confused as he did, still fighting to keep hold on the struggling Scabbers. Hermione, however, took an uncertain step toward Snape

and said, in a very breathless voice, “Professor Snape — it — it wouldn’t hurt to hear what they’ve got to say, w-would it?”

“Miss Granger, you are already facing suspension from this school,” Snape spat. “You, Potter, and Weasley are out-of-bounds, in the company of a convicted murderer and a werewolf. For once in your life, *hold your tongue*.”

“But if — if there was a mistake —”

“KEEP QUIET, YOU STUPID GIRL!” Snape shouted, looking suddenly quite deranged. “DON’T TALK ABOUT WHAT YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND!” A few sparks shot out of the end of his wand, which was still pointed at Black’s face. Hermione fell silent.

“Vengeance is very sweet,” Snape breathed at Black. “How I hoped I would be the one to catch you. . . .”

“The joke’s on you again, Severus,” Black snarled. “As long as this boy brings his rat up to the castle” — he jerked his head at Ron — “I’ll come quietly. . . .”

“Up to the castle?” said Snape silkily. “I don’t think we need to go that far. All I have to do is call the dementors once we get out of the Willow. They’ll be very pleased to see you, Black . . . pleased enough to give you a little Kiss, I daresay. . . .”

What little color there was in Black’s face left it.

“You — you’ve got to hear me out,” he croaked. “The rat — look at the rat —”

But there was a mad glint in Snape’s eyes that Harry had never seen before. He seemed beyond reason.

“Come on, all of you,” he said. He clicked his fingers, and the ends of the cords that bound Lupin flew to his hands. “I’ll drag the

werewolf. Perhaps the dementors will have a Kiss for him too —”

Before he knew what he was doing, Harry had crossed the room in three strides and blocked the door.

“Get out of the way, Potter, you’re in enough trouble already,” snarled Snape. “If I hadn’t been here to save your skin —”

“Professor Lupin could have killed me about a hundred times this year,” Harry said. “I’ve been alone with him loads of times, having defense lessons against the dementors. If he was helping Black, why didn’t he just finish me off then?”

“Don’t ask me to fathom the way a werewolf’s mind works,” hissed Snape. “Get out of the way, Potter.”

“YOU’RE PATHETIC!” Harry yelled. “JUST BECAUSE THEY MADE A FOOL OF YOU AT SCHOOL YOU WON’T EVEN LISTEN —”

“SILENCE! I WILL NOT BE SPOKEN TO LIKE THAT!” Snape shrieked, looking madder than ever. “Like father, like son, Potter! I have just saved your neck; you should be thanking me on bended knee! You would have been well served if he’d killed you! You’d have died like your father, too arrogant to believe you might be mistaken in Black — now get out of the way, or I will *make you*. GET OUT OF THE WAY, POTTER!”

Harry made up his mind in a split second. Before Snape could take even one step toward him, he had raised his wand.

“*Expelliarmus!*” he yelled — except that his wasn’t the only voice that shouted. There was a blast that made the door rattle on its hinges; Snape was lifted off his feet and slammed into the wall, then slid down it to the floor, a trickle of blood oozing from under his

hair. He had been knocked out.

Harry looked around. Both Ron and Hermione had tried to Disarm Snape at exactly the same moment. Snape's wand soared in a high arc and landed on the bed next to Crookshanks.

"You shouldn't have done that," said Black, looking at Harry. "You should have left him to me. . . ."

Harry avoided Black's eyes. He wasn't sure, even now, that he'd done the right thing.

"We attacked a teacher. . . . We attacked a teacher. . . ." Hermione whimpered, staring at the lifeless Snape with frightened eyes. "Oh, we're going to be in so much trouble —"

Lupin was struggling against his bonds. Black bent down quickly and untied him. Lupin straightened up, rubbing his arms where the ropes had cut into them.

"Thank you, Harry," he said.

"I'm still not saying I believe you," Harry retorted.

"Then it's time we offered you some proof," said Black. "You, boy — give me Peter. Now."

Ron clutched Scabbers closer to his chest.

"Come off it," he said weakly. "Are you trying to say he broke out of Azkaban just to get his hands on *Scabbers*? I mean. . . ." He looked up at Harry and Hermione for support. "Okay, say Pettigrew could turn into a rat — there are millions of rats — how's he supposed to know which one he's after if he was locked up in Azkaban?"

"You know, Sirius, that's a fair question," said Lupin, turning to Black and frowning slightly. "How *did* you find out where he was?"

Black put one of his clawlike hands inside his robes and took out a

crumpled piece of paper, which he smoothed flat and held out to show the others.

It was the photograph of Ron and his family that had appeared in the *Daily Prophet* the previous summer, and there, on Ron's shoulder, was Scabbers.

"How did you get this?" Lupin asked Black, thunderstruck.

"Fudge," said Black. "When he came to inspect Azkaban last year, he gave me his paper. And there was Peter, on the front page . . . on this boy's shoulder. . . . I knew him at once . . . how many times had I seen him transform? And the caption said the boy would be going back to Hogwarts . . . to where Harry was. . . ."

"My God," said Lupin softly, staring from Scabbers to the picture in the paper and back again. "His front paw . . ."

"What about it?" said Ron defiantly.

"He's got a toe missing," said Black.

"Of course," Lupin breathed. "So simple . . . so *brilliant* . . . he cut it off himself?"

"Just before he transformed," said Black. "When I cornered him, he yelled for the whole street to hear that I'd betrayed Lily and James. Then, before I could curse him, he blew apart the street with the wand behind his back, killed everyone within twenty feet of himself — and sped down into the sewer with the other rats. . . ."

"Didn't you ever hear, Ron?" said Lupin. "The biggest bit of Peter they found was his finger."

"Look, Scabbers probably had a fight with another rat or something! He's been in my family for ages, right —"

"Twelve years, in fact," said Lupin. "Didn't you ever wonder why

he was living so long?"

"We — we've been taking good care of him!" said Ron.

"Not looking too good at the moment, though, is he?" said Lupin. "I'd guess he's been losing weight ever since he heard Sirius was on the loose again. . . ."

"He's been scared of that mad cat!" said Ron, nodding toward Crookshanks, who was still purring on the bed.

But that wasn't right, Harry thought suddenly. . . . Scabbers had been looking ill before he met Crookshanks. . . . ever since Ron's return from Egypt. . . . since the time when Black had escaped. . . .

"This cat isn't mad," said Black hoarsely. He reached out a bony hand and stroked Crookshanks's fluffy head. "He's the most intelligent of his kind I've ever met. He recognized Peter for what he was right away. And when he met me, he knew I was no dog. It was a while before he trusted me. . . . Finally, I managed to communicate to him what I was after, and he's been helping me. . . ."

"What do you mean?" breathed Hermione.

"He tried to bring Peter to me, but couldn't. . . . so he stole the passwords into Gryffindor Tower for me. . . . As I understand it, he took them from a boy's bedside table. . . ."

Harry's brain seemed to be sagging under the weight of what he was hearing. It was absurd. . . . and yet. . . .

"But Peter got wind of what was going on and ran for it. . . ."

croaked Black. "This cat — Crookshanks, did you call him? — told me Peter had left blood on the sheets. . . . I supposed he bit himself. . . . Well, faking his own death had worked once. . . ."

These words jolted Harry to his senses.

“And why did he fake his death?” he said furiously. “Because he knew you were about to kill him like you killed my parents!”

“No,” said Lupin, “Harry —”

“And now you’ve come to finish him off!”

“Yes, I have,” said Black, with an evil look at Scabbers.

“Then I should’ve let Snape take you!” Harry shouted.

“Harry,” said Lupin hurriedly, “don’t you see? All this time we’ve thought Sirius betrayed your parents, and Peter tracked him down — but it was the other way around, don’t you see? *Peter* betrayed your mother and father — Sirius tracked *Peter* down —”

“THAT’S NOT TRUE!” Harry yelled. “HE WAS THEIR SECRET-KEEPER! HE SAID SO BEFORE YOU TURNED UP. HE SAID HE KILLED THEM!”

He was pointing at Black, who shook his head slowly; the sunken eyes were suddenly overbright.

“Harry . . . I as good as killed them,” he croaked. “I persuaded Lily and James to change to Peter at the last moment, persuaded them to use him as Secret-Keeper instead of me. . . . I’m to blame, I know it. . . . The night they died, I’d arranged to check on Peter, make sure he was still safe, but when I arrived at his hiding place, he’d gone. Yet there was no sign of a struggle. It didn’t feel right. I was scared. I set out for your parents’ house straightaway. And when I saw their house, destroyed, and their bodies . . . I realized what Peter must’ve done . . . what I’d done. . . .”

His voice broke. He turned away.

“Enough of this,” said Lupin, and there was a steely note in his voice Harry had never heard before. “There’s one certain way to

prove what really happened. Ron, *give me that rat.*”

“What are you going to do with him if I give him to you?” Ron asked Lupin tensely.

“Force him to show himself,” said Lupin. “If he really is a rat, it won’t hurt him.”

Ron hesitated. Then at long last, he held out Scabbers and Lupin took him. Scabbers began to squeak without stopping, twisting and turning, his tiny black eyes bulging in his head.

“Ready, Sirius?” said Lupin.

Black had already retrieved Snape’s wand from the bed. He approached Lupin and the struggling rat, and his wet eyes suddenly seemed to be burning in his face.

“Together?” he said quietly.

“I think so,” said Lupin, holding Scabbers tightly in one hand and his wand in the other. “On the count of three. One — two — THREE!”

A flash of blue-white light erupted from both wands; for a moment, Scabbers was frozen in midair, his small gray form twisting madly — Ron yelled — the rat fell and hit the floor. There was another blinding flash of light and then —

It was like watching a speeded-up film of a growing tree. A head was shooting upward from the ground; limbs were sprouting; a moment later, a man was standing where Scabbers had been, cringing and wringing his hands. Crookshanks was spitting and snarling on the bed; the hair on his back was standing up.

He was a very short man, hardly taller than Harry and Hermione. His thin, colorless hair was unkempt and there was a large bald patch

on top. He had the shrunken appearance of a plump man who has lost a lot of weight in a short time. His skin looked grubby, almost like Scabbers's fur, and something of the rat lingered around his pointed nose and his very small, watery eyes. He looked around at them all, his breathing fast and shallow. Harry saw his eyes dart to the door and back again.

"Well, hello, Peter," said Lupin pleasantly, as though rats frequently erupted into old school friends around him. "Long time, no see."

"S-Sirius . . . R-Remus . . ." Even Pettigrew's voice was squeaky. Again, his eyes darted toward the door. "My friends . . . my old friends . . ."

Black's wand arm rose, but Lupin seized him around the wrist, gave him a warning look, then turned again to Pettigrew, his voice light and casual.

"We've been having a little chat, Peter, about what happened the night Lily and James died. You might have missed the finer points while you were squeaking around down there on the bed —"

"Remus," gasped Pettigrew, and Harry could see beads of sweat breaking out over his pasty face, "you don't believe him, do you . . . ? He tried to kill me, Remus. . . ."

"So we've heard," said Lupin, more coldly. "I'd like to clear up one or two little matters with you, Peter, if you'd be so —"

"He's come to try and kill me again!" Pettigrew squeaked suddenly, pointing at Black, and Harry saw that he used his middle finger, because his index was missing. "He killed Lily and James and now he's going to kill me too . . . You've got to help me,

Remus. . . .”

Black’s face looked more skull-like than ever as he stared at Pettigrew with his fathomless eyes.

“No one’s going to try and kill you until we’ve sorted a few things out,” said Lupin.

“Sorted things out?” squealed Pettigrew, looking wildly about him once more, eyes taking in the boarded windows and, again, the only door. “I knew he’d come after me! I knew he’d be back for me! I’ve been waiting for this for twelve years!”

“You knew Sirius was going to break out of Azkaban?” said Lupin, his brow furrowed. “When nobody has ever done it before?”

“He’s got Dark powers the rest of us can only dream of!” Pettigrew shouted shrilly. “How else did he get out of there? I suppose He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named taught him a few tricks!”

Black started to laugh, a horrible, mirthless laugh that filled the whole room.

“Voldemort, teach me tricks?” he said.

Pettigrew flinched as though Black had brandished a whip at him.

“What, scared to hear your old master’s name?” said Black. “I don’t blame you, Peter. His lot aren’t very happy with you, are they?”

“Don’t know what you mean, Sirius —” muttered Pettigrew, his breathing faster than ever. His whole face was shining with sweat now.

“You haven’t been hiding from *me* for twelve years,” said Black. “You’ve been hiding from Voldemort’s old supporters. I heard things in Azkaban, Peter. . . . They all think you’re dead, or you’d have to answer to them. . . . I’ve heard them screaming all sorts of things in

their sleep. Sounds like they think the double-crosser double-crossed them. Voldemort went to the Potters' on your information . . . and Voldemort met his downfall there. And not all Voldemort's supporters ended up in Azkaban, did they? There are still plenty out here, biding their time, pretending they've seen the error of their ways. . . . If they ever got wind that you were still alive, Peter —"

"Don't know . . . what you're talking about . . .," said Pettigrew again, more shrilly than ever. He wiped his face on his sleeve and looked up at Lupin. "You don't believe this — this madness, Remus —"

"I must admit, Peter, I have difficulty in understanding why an innocent man would want to spend twelve years as a rat," said Lupin evenly.

"Innocent, but scared!" squealed Pettigrew. "If Voldemort's supporters were after me, it was because I put one of their best men in Azkaban — the spy, Sirius Black!"

Black's face contorted.

"How dare you," he growled, sounding suddenly like the bear-sized dog he had been. "I, a spy for Voldemort? When did I ever sneak around people who were stronger and more powerful than myself? But you, Peter — I'll never understand why I didn't see you were the spy from the start. You always liked big friends who'd look after you, didn't you? It used to be us . . . me and Remus . . . and James. . . ."

Pettigrew wiped his face again; he was almost panting for breath.

"Me, a spy . . . must be out of your mind . . . never . . . don't know how you can say such a —"

“Lily and James only made you Secret-Keeper because I suggested it,” Black hissed, so venomously that Pettigrew took a step backward. “I thought it was the perfect plan . . . a bluff. Voldemort would be sure to come after me, would never dream they’d use a weak, talentless thing like you. . . . It must have been the finest moment of your miserable life, telling Voldemort you could hand him the Potters.”

Pettigrew was muttering distractedly; Harry caught words like “far-fetched” and “lunacy,” but he couldn’t help paying more attention to the ashen color of Pettigrew’s face and the way his eyes continued to dart toward the windows and door.

“Professor Lupin?” said Hermione timidly. “Can — can I say something?”

“Certainly, Hermione,” said Lupin courteously.

“Well — Scabbers — I mean, this — this man — he’s been sleeping in Harry’s dormitory for three years. If he’s working for You-Know-Who, how come he never tried to hurt Harry before now?”

“There!” said Pettigrew shrilly, pointing at Ron with his maimed hand. “Thank you! You see, Remus? I have never hurt a hair of Harry’s head! Why should I?”

“I’ll tell you why,” said Black. “Because you never did anything for anyone unless you could see what was in it for you. Voldemort’s been in hiding for twelve years, they say he’s half dead. You weren’t about to commit murder right under Albus Dumbledore’s nose, for a wreck of a wizard who’d lost all of his power, were you? You’d want to be quite sure he was the biggest bully in the playground

before you went back to him, wouldn't you? Why else did you find a wizard family to take you in? Keeping an ear out for news, weren't you, Peter? Just in case your old protector regained strength, and it was safe to rejoin him. . . .”

Pettigrew opened his mouth and closed it several times. He seemed to have lost the ability to talk.

“Er — Mr. Black — Sirius?” said Hermione.

Black jumped at being addressed like this and stared at Hermione as though being spoken to politely was something he'd long forgotten.

“If you don't mind me asking, how — how did you get out of Azkaban, if you didn't use Dark Magic?”

“Thank you!” gasped Pettigrew, nodding frantically at her. “Exactly! Precisely what I —”

But Lupin silenced him with a look. Black was frowning slightly at Hermione, but not as though he were annoyed with her. He seemed to be pondering his answer.

“I don't know how I did it,” he said slowly. “I think the only reason I never lost my mind is that I knew I was innocent. That wasn't a happy thought, so the dementors couldn't suck it out of me . . . but it kept me sane and knowing who I am . . . helped me keep my powers . . . so when it all became . . . too much . . . I could transform in my cell . . . become a dog. Dementors can't see, you know. . . .” He swallowed. “They feel their way toward people by sensing their emotions. . . . They could tell that my feelings were less — less human, less complex when I was a dog . . . but they thought, of course, that I was losing my mind like everyone else in there, so it didn't trouble them. But I was weak, very weak, and I had no hope of

driving them away from me without a wand. . . .

“But then I saw Peter in that picture . . . I realized he was at Hogwarts with Harry . . . perfectly positioned to act, if one hint reached his ears that the Dark Side was gathering strength again. . . .”

Pettigrew was shaking his head, mouthing noiselessly, but staring all the while at Black as though hypnotized.

“ . . . ready to strike at the moment he could be sure of allies and to deliver the last Potter to them. If he gave them Harry, who’d dare say he’d betrayed Lord Voldemort? He’d be welcomed back with honors. . . .

“So you see, I had to do something. I was the only one who knew Peter was still alive. . . .”

Harry remembered what Mr. Weasley had told Mrs. Weasley. “The guards say he’s been talking in his sleep . . . always the same words . . . *‘He’s at Hogwarts.’*”

“It was as if someone had lit a fire in my head, and the dementors couldn’t destroy it. . . . It wasn’t a happy feeling . . . it was an obsession . . . but it gave me strength, it cleared my mind. So, one night when they opened my door to bring food, I slipped past them as a dog. . . . It’s so much harder for them to sense animal emotions that they were confused. . . . I was thin, very thin . . . thin enough to slip through the bars. . . . I swam as a dog back to the mainland. . . . I journeyed north and slipped into the Hogwarts grounds as a dog. I’ve been living in the forest ever since, except when I came to watch the Quidditch, of course. You fly as well as your father did, Harry. . . .”

He looked at Harry, who did not look away.

“Believe me,” croaked Black. “Believe me, Harry. I never

betrayed James and Lily. I would have died before I betrayed them.”

And at long last, Harry believed him. Throat too tight to speak, he nodded.

“No!”

Pettigrew had fallen to his knees as though Harry’s nod had been his own death sentence. He shuffled forward on his knees, groveling, his hands clasped in front of him as though praying.

“Sirius — it’s me . . . it’s Peter . . . your friend . . . you wouldn’t . . .”

Black kicked out and Pettigrew recoiled.

“There’s enough filth on my robes without you touching them,” said Black.

“Remus!” Pettigrew squeaked, turning to Lupin instead, writhing imploringly in front of him. “You don’t believe this . . . Wouldn’t Sirius have told you they’d changed the plan?”

“Not if he thought I was the spy, Peter,” said Lupin. “I assume that’s why you didn’t tell me, Sirius?” he said casually over Pettigrew’s head.

“Forgive me, Remus,” said Black.

“Not at all, Padfoot, old friend,” said Lupin, who was now rolling up his sleeves. “And will you, in turn, forgive me for believing *you* were the spy?”

“Of course,” said Black, and the ghost of a grin flitted across his gaunt face. He, too, began rolling up his sleeves. “Shall we kill him together?”

“Yes, I think so,” said Lupin grimly.

“You wouldn’t . . . you won’t . . .,” gasped Pettigrew. And he

scrambled around to Ron.

“Ron . . . haven’t I been a good friend . . . a good pet? You won’t let them kill me, Ron, will you . . . you’re on my side, aren’t you?”

But Ron was staring at Pettigrew with the utmost revulsion.

“I let you sleep in my *bed*!” he said.

“Kind boy . . . kind master . . .” Pettigrew crawled toward Ron, “you won’t let them do it . . . I was your rat . . . I was a good pet. . . .”

“If you made a better rat than a human, it’s not much to boast about, Peter,” said Black harshly. Ron, going still paler with pain, wrenched his broken leg out of Pettigrew’s reach. Pettigrew turned on his knees, staggered forward, and seized the hem of Hermione’s robes.

“Sweet girl . . . clever girl . . . you — you won’t let them. . . . Help me. . . .”

Hermione pulled her robes out of Pettigrew’s clutching hands and backed away against the wall, looking horrified.

Pettigrew knelt, trembling uncontrollably, and turned his head slowly toward Harry.

“Harry . . . Harry . . . you look just like your father . . . just like him . . .”

“HOW DARE YOU SPEAK TO HARRY?” roared Black. “HOW DARE YOU FACE HIM? HOW DARE YOU TALK ABOUT JAMES IN FRONT OF HIM?”

“Harry,” whispered Pettigrew, shuffling toward him, hands outstretched. “Harry, James wouldn’t have wanted me killed. . . . James would have understood, Harry . . . he would have shown me mercy. . . .”

Both Black and Lupin strode forward, seized Pettigrew's shoulders, and threw him backward onto the floor. He sat there, twitching with terror, staring up at them.

"You sold Lily and James to Voldemort," said Black, who was shaking too. "Do you deny it?"

Pettigrew burst into tears. It was horrible to watch. He looked like an oversized, balding baby, cowering on the floor.

"Sirius, Sirius, what could I have done? The Dark Lord . . . you have no idea . . . he has weapons you can't imagine. . . . I was scared, Sirius, I was never brave like you and Remus and James. I never meant it to happen. . . . He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named forced me —"

"DON'T LIE!" bellowed Black. "YOU'D BEEN PASSING INFORMATION TO HIM FOR A YEAR BEFORE LILY AND JAMES DIED! YOU WERE HIS SPY!"

"He — he was taking over everywhere!" gasped Pettigrew. "What was there to be gained by refusing him?"

"What was there to be gained by fighting the most evil wizard who has ever existed?" said Black, with a terrible fury in his face. "Only innocent lives, Peter!"

"You don't understand!" whined Pettigrew. "He would have killed me, Sirius!"

"THEN YOU SHOULD HAVE DIED!" roared Black. "DIED RATHER THAN BETRAY YOUR FRIENDS, AS WE WOULD HAVE DONE FOR YOU!"

Black and Lupin stood shoulder to shoulder, wands raised.

"You should have realized," said Lupin quietly, "if Voldemort didn't kill you, we would. Good-bye, Peter."

Hermione covered her face with her hands and turned to the wall.

“NO!” Harry yelled. He ran forward, placing himself in front of Pettigrew, facing the wands. “You can’t kill him,” he said breathlessly. “You can’t.”

Black and Lupin both looked staggered.

“Harry, this piece of vermin is the reason you have no parents,” Black snarled. “This cringing bit of filth would have seen you die too, without turning a hair. You heard him. His own stinking skin meant more to him than your whole family.”

“I know,” Harry panted. “We’ll take him up to the castle. We’ll hand him over to the dementors. . . . He can go to Azkaban . . . but don’t kill him.”

“Harry!” gasped Pettigrew, and he flung his arms around Harry’s knees. “You — thank you — it’s more than I deserve — thank you —”

“Get off me,” Harry spat, throwing Pettigrew’s hands off him in disgust. “I’m not doing this for you. I’m doing it because I don’t reckon my dad would’ve wanted his best friends to become killers — just for you.”

No one moved or made a sound except Pettigrew, whose breath was coming in wheezes as he clutched his chest. Black and Lupin were looking at each other. Then, with one movement, they lowered their wands.

“You’re the only person who has the right to decide, Harry,” said Black. “But think . . . think what he did. . . .”

“He can go to Azkaban,” Harry repeated. “If anyone deserves that place, he does. . . .”

Pettigrew was still wheezing behind him.

“Very well,” said Lupin. “Stand aside, Harry.”

Harry hesitated.

“I’m going to tie him up,” said Lupin. “That’s all, I swear.”

Harry stepped out of the way. Thin cords shot from Lupin’s wand this time, and next moment, Pettigrew was wriggling on the floor, bound and gagged.

“But if you transform, Peter,” growled Black, his own wand pointing at Pettigrew too, “we *will* kill you. You agree, Harry?”

Harry looked down at the pitiful figure on the floor and nodded so that Pettigrew could see him.

“Right,” said Lupin, suddenly businesslike. “Ron, I can’t mend bones nearly as well as Madam Pomfrey, so I think it’s best if we just strap your leg up until we can get you to the hospital wing.”

He hurried over to Ron, bent down, tapped Ron’s leg with his wand, and muttered, “*Ferula*.” Bandages spun up Ron’s leg, strapping it tightly to a splint. Lupin helped him to his feet; Ron put his weight gingerly on the leg and didn’t wince.

“That’s better,” he said. “Thanks.”

“What about Professor Snape?” said Hermione in a small voice, looking down at Snape’s prone figure.

“There’s nothing seriously wrong with him,” said Lupin, bending over Snape and checking his pulse. “You were just a little — overenthusiastic. Still out cold. Er — perhaps it will be best if we don’t revive him until we’re safely back in the castle. We can take him like this. . . .”

He muttered, “*Mobilicorpus*.” As though invisible strings were

tied to Snape's wrists, neck, and knees, he was pulled into a standing position, head still lolling unpleasantly, like a grotesque puppet. He hung a few inches above the ground, his limp feet dangling. Lupin picked up the Invisibility Cloak and tucked it safely into his pocket.

"And two of us should be chained to this," said Black, nudging Pettigrew with his toe. "Just to make sure."

"I'll do it," said Lupin.

"And me," said Ron savagely, limping forward.

Black conjured heavy manacles from thin air; soon Pettigrew was upright again, left arm chained to Lupin's right, right arm to Ron's left. Ron's face was set. He seemed to have taken Scabbers's true identity as a personal insult. Crookshanks leapt lightly off the bed and led the way out of the room, his bottlebrush tail held jauntily high.

Woldemort se Dienskneg

Hermien los 'n kreet. Swardt kom steierend orent. Harry spring op asof hy 'n elektriese skok gekry het.

“Ek het dit aan die voet van die Woelige Wilg gekry,” sê Snerp en gooi die mantel eenkant neer terwyl hy sy towerstaf sorgvuldig op Lupin gerig hou. “Baie nuttig, Potter, dankie . . .”

Snerp is effens kortasem, maar sy gesig is vol onderdrukte triomf. “Julle wonder seker hoe ek geweet het dat julle hier is?” sê hy en sy oë skitter. “Ek was nou net in jou kantoor, Lupin. Jy het vergeet om jou Towerdrankie te drink, dus het ek 'n drinkbeker vol soontoe geneem. Wat 'n geluiskoot . . . vir my, bedoel ek. Daar het 'n kaart op jou lessenaar gelê. Een blik was genoeg om my alles te vertel wat ek wou weet. Ek het jou met hierdie tunnel sien hardloop en toe het jy verdwyn.”

“Severus —” begin Lupin, maar Snerp praat hom dood.

“Ek het oor en oor vir die skoolhoof gesê dat jy jou ou vriend Swardt help om in die kasteel te kom, Lupin, en hier is die bewys. Selfs ek het nooit kon droom dat jy die vermetelheid sou hê om die ou huis as wegkruipplek te gebruik nie —”

“Severus, jy maak 'n fout,” sê Lupin dringend. “Jy't nie alles gehoor nie — ek kan verduidelik — Sirius is nie hier om vir Harry dood te maak —”

“Nog twee vir Azkaban,” sê Snerp en nou gloei sy oë nog meer fanaties. “Ek sal graag wil sien hoe Dompeldorius dit verwerk . . . Hy was vas oortuig dat jy skadeloos is, weet jy, Lupin. . . 'n mak weerwolf . . .”

“Jou dwaas,” sê Lupin sag. “Is 'n skoolseun se grief genoeg rede om 'n onskuldige man terug Azkaban toe te stuur?”

BOEM! Dun, slangagtige koorde bars uit die punt van Snerp se towerstaf en draai hulself om Lupin se mond, gewrigte en enkels; hy verloor sy balans en slaan op die grond neer. Hy kan nie roer nie. Met 'n verwonde gebrul maak Swardt 'n beweging na Snerp toe, maar Snerp rig sy towerstaf vol tussen Swardt se oë.

“Gee my 'n rede,” fluister hy. “Gee my 'n rede om dit te doen en ek sweer ek sal.”

Swardt gaan botstil staan. Dit is onmoontlik om te sê wie se gesig meer vertrek van haat is.

Harry staan soos een wat verlam is. Hy weet nie wat om te doen of vir wie om te glo nie. Hy kyk om na Ron en Hermien. Ron, wat net so verward soos hy lyk, sukkel nog steeds om sy houvas op die spartelende Skille te behou. Hermien gee egter 'n onseker tree na Snerp toe en sê in 'n hees stem, "Professor Snerp – dit – dit sal seker nie kwaad doen om te hoor wat hulle wil sê nie, of hoe?"

"Juffrou La Grange, jy's reeds op die punt om uit hierdie skool geskors te word," spoeg Snerp dit uit. "Jy, Potter en Weasley is op verbode terrein en in die geselskap van 'n weerwolf en 'n veroordeelde moordenaar. Hou net hierdie een keer in jou lewe jou mond."

"Maar as daar – as daar 'n fout gemaak is –"

"HOU JOU SNATER, JOU SIMPELE KLEIN DOGTERTJIE!" skree Snerp, wat skielik lyk asof hy heeltemal buite sy sinne is. "MOENIE OOR GOED PRAAT WAARVAN JY NIKS WEET NIE!" 'n Paar vonke skiet uit die punt van sy towerstaf wat nog steeds na Swardt se gesig wys. Hermien bly stil.

"Wraak is baie soet," sê Snerp skor vir Swardt. "Hoe het ek nie gewens dat ek die een mag wees om jou te vang nie . . ."

"Die grap is weer eens ten koste van jou, Severus," snou Swardt hom toe. "Solank as daardie seun sy rot kasteel toe bring –" hy wys met sy kop na Ron, "– is ek heeltemal bereid om gewillig te kom . . ."

"Na die kasteel?" sê Snerp liefies. "Ek dink nie ons hoef soveel moeite te doen nie. Al wat ek hoef te doen, is om die Dementors te roep sodra ons buitekant die Wilg is. Hulle sal baie bly wees om jou te sien, Swardt . . . bly genoeg om vir jou 'n ou soentjie te wil gee . . ."

Die laaste bietjie kleur verlaat Swardt se gesig.

"Jy – jy moet na my luister," kreun hy. "Die rot – kyk na die rot –"

Daar is egter 'n waansinnige glinstering in Snerp se oë wat Harry nog nooit tevore gesien het nie. Dit lyk of hy buite rede is.

"Komaan, almal van julle," sê hy. Hy klap sy vingers en die punte van die koorde waarmee Lupin vasgemaak is, vlieg na sy hande. "Ek sal die weerwolf saamsleep. Dalk wil die Dementors hom ook soen –"

Voor hy mooi kan dink wat hy doen, beweeg Harry in drie tree oor die vloer en gaan staan voor die deur.

"Gee pad, Potter, jy's al in genoeg moeilikheid," snou Snerp hom toe. "As ek nie hier was om jou bas te red nie –"

"Professor Lupin kon my hierdie jaar al honderde kere doodgemaak het," sê Harry. "Ek was tonne kere alleen by hom toe hy vir my lesse teen die Dementors gegee het. As hy vir Swardt gehelp het, hoekom het hy nie toe met my klaargespeel nie?"

"Moenie vir my vra om te probeer peil hoe 'n weerwolf se kop werk nie," grom Snerp. "Gee pad, Potter."

"JY IS PATETIES!" gil Harry. "NET OMDAT HULLE OP SKOOL 'N GEK VAN JOU GEMAAK HET, WIL JY NIE EENS LUISTER –"

"STILTE! EK SAL NIE TOELAAT DAT JY SO MET MY PRAAT NIE!" gil Snerp en hy lyk kwater as ooit. "Aardjie na sy vaartjie, nè, Potter! Ek het so pas jou lewe gered, jy behoort my op jou knieë te bedank! Dit sou jou verdiende loon gewees het as hy jou vermoor het! Jy sou soos jou vader gesterf het, te arrogant om te glo dat jy 'n fout gemaak het deur vir Swardt te vertrou – uit die pad, of ek forseer jou, GEE PAD, POTTER!"

Binne 'n breukdeel van 'n sekonde het Harry sy besluit geneem. Voor Snerp selfs een tree nader aan hom kan gee, is sy towerstaf al in die lug.

"Expelliarmus!" gil hy – behalwe dat syne nie die enigste stem is wat skree nie. 'n Ontploffing wat die deur in sy skarniere laat ratel, volg; Snerp word van sy voete gelig en teen die muur gegooi en hy gly af vloer toe terwyl 'n dun straaltjie bloed onder sy hare uitloop. Hy is so uit soos 'n kers.

Harry kyk om. Sowel Ron as Hermien het op presies dieselfde oomblik vir Snerp probeer ontwapen. Snerp se towerstaf maak 'n hoë boog deur die lug en land op die bed langs Kromskeen.

"Julle moes dit nie gedoen het nie," sê Swardt terwyl hy na Harry kyk. "Julle moes hom vir my gelos het . . ."

Harry vermy Swardt se oë. Selfs nou is hy nog nie seker of hy die regte ding gedoen het nie.

"Ons het 'n onderwyser aangeval . . . ons het 'n onderwyser aangeval . . ." kerm Hermien terwyl sy met verskrikte oë na Snerp se leweloze liggaam staar. "O, ons gaan so in die moeilikheid wees –"

Lupin worstel met die toue. Swardt buk vinnig af en maak hom los. Lupin kom orent en vryf sy arms waar hulle deur die toue gesny is.

"Dankie, Harry," sê hy.

"Ek is nog steeds nie seker of ek julle kan glo nie," kap Harry terug.

"Dan is dit tyd dat ons die bewyse lewer," sê Swardt. "Jy daar, seun – gee vir Pieter aan. Dadelik."

Ron hou vir Skille stywer teen sy bors vas.

"Vergeet dit," sê hy floutjies. "Probeer jy sê jy het uit Azkaban ontsnap net om jou hande op Skille te kan lê? Ek bedoel . . ." Hy kyk na Harry en Hermien vir ondersteuning. "Oukei, sê nou Pansegrouw kan wel in 'n rot verander – daar's tog miljoene rotte – hoe weet jy kamma wie is wie as jy die hele tyd in Azkaban opgesluit was?"

"Jy weet, Sirius, dis 'n billike vraag," sê Lupin terwyl hy met 'n effense frons na Swardt draai. "Hoe het jy geweet waar hy is?"

Swardt steek een van sy klouagtige hande onder sy kleed in en haal 'n opgefrommelde stuk papier uit wat hy platstryk en voor die ander hou om te sien.

Dit is die foto van Ron en sy gesin wat die vorige somer in die Daag-

likse Profeet verskyn het en daar, op Ron se skouer, sit Skille.

"Waar het jy dit gekry?" wil Lupin verstom by Swardt weet.

"Broddelwerk," sê Swardt. "Toe hy Azkaban verlede jaar kom inspekteer het, het hy sy koerant vir my gegee. En daar op die voorblad was Pieter . . . op hierdie seun se skouer . . . ek het hom dadelik herken . . . hoeveel keer het ek hom nie sien transformeer nie? En die berig het gesê dat die seun teruggaan Hogwarts toe . . . waar Harry is . . ."

"Grote genade," sê Lupin gedemp, terwyl hy van Skille na die foto en weer terug kyk. "Sy voorpoot . . ."

"Wat daarvan?" sê Ron uitdagend.

"Hy kort een toon," sê Swardt.

"Natuurlik," sê Lupin, "so eenvoudig . . . so briljant . . . het hy dit self afgesny?"

"Net voor hy getransformeer het," sê Swardt. "Toe ek hom in 'n hoek gedryf het, het hy geskree dat ek vir Lily en James vermoor het, so hard dat die hele straat hom kon hoor. Toe, voor ek hom kon vervloek, het hy die straat opgeblaas – met sy towerstaf agter sy rug. Almal binne twintig tree van hom af is dood – en hy het saam met die ander rotte in die riool verdwyn . . ."

"Het jy nooit gehoor nie, Ron?" sê Lupin. "Die grootste stuk wat ooit van Pieter Pansegrouw gevind is, was sy vinger."

"Wel, Skille het seker net met 'n ander rot baklei of iets! Hy's al eeue in ons gesin, oukei –"

"Twaalf jaar, om die waarheid te sê," sê Lupin. "Het jy nog nooit gewonder hoekom hy so lank lewe nie?"

"Ons – ons sorg goed vir hom!" sê Ron.

"Lyk nie op die oomblik of dit so goed met hom gaan nie, of hoe?" sê Lupin. "Ek sou sê hy't gewig begin verloor die oomblik toe hy gehoor het dat Sirius op vrye voet is . . ."

"Hy was bang vir daardie mal kat!" sê Ron en wys na Kromskeen wat nog steeds op die bed lê en spin.

Dit is nie waar nie, onthou Harry skielik . . . Skille het al siek gelyk nog voor hy vir Kromskeen leer ken het . . . sedert Ron uit Egipte teruggekeer het . . . sedert Swardt ontsnap het . . .

"Hierdie kat is nie mal nie," sê Swardt skor. Hy steek 'n benerige hand uit en streel Kromskeen se wollerige kop. "Hy's die intelligentste dier in sy soort wat ek nog ooit teëgekom het. Hy het dadelik besef wat Pieter is. En toe hy my ontmoet het, het hy besef dat ek nie 'n hond is nie. Dit het 'n rukkie geneem voor hy my vertrou het. Toe ek dit uiteindelik reggekry het om hom te laat verstaan wat ek wil doen, het hy my begin help . . ."

"Wat bedoel jy?" vra Hermien kortasem.

"Hy't probeer om Pieter na my toe te bring, maar hy kon nie . . . Toe het hy die Griffindortoring se wagwoorde gesteel . . . Soos ek dit verstaan,

het hy dit van een van die seuns se bedkassies afgehaal . . . Pieter het egter agtergekom wat aangaan en weggehardloop.”

Dit voel vir Harry of sy brein gaan ingee onder die aanslag van alles wat hy moet verwerk. Dit is heeltemal belaglik . . . maar tog, Swardt het die nag met die aanval na Ron se bed gegaan, nie na Harry s'n nie . . .

“Wel, hoe verklaar jy dat daar bloed op my lakens was?” vra Ron aggressief.

“Ek veronderstel hy het homself gebyt . . . wel, toe hy die vorige keer gemaak het of hy dood is, het dit heel goed gewerk . . .”

Dis of hierdie woorde Harry tot sy sinne ruk.

“En hoekom het hy gemaak of hy dood is?” sê hy woedend. “Omdat hy geweet het dat jy hom gaan doodmaak soos jy my ouers doodgemaak het!”

“Nee,” sê Lupin. “Harry –”

“En nou wil jy met *hom* klaarspeel!”

“Ja, ek wil,” sê Swardt en kyk dreigend na Skille.

“Ek moes eerder dat Snerp julle weggevat het!” skree Harry.

“Harry,” sê Lupin gejaag, “kan jy dan nie verstaan nie? Ons het nog die hele tyd gedink dat Sirius jou ouers verrai het en dat Pieter hom opgespoor het – maar dis andersom, kan jy dit nie insien nie? *Pieter* het jou moeder en vader verrai – Sirius het vir *Pieter* opgespoor –”

“DIS NIE WAAR NIE!” gil Harry. “HY WAS HUL GEHEIMHOUER! HY HET SELF SO GESÊ VOOR JY GEKOM HET, HY'T GESÊ HY'T HULLE VERMOOR!”

Hy beduie na Swardt wat sy kop stadig skud. Sy versonke oë is skielik uitermate blink.

“Harry . . . ek het hulle so goed as doodgemaak,” sê hy met 'n kreun. “Ek het vir Lily en James op die laaste oomblik oorreed om hul plan te verander, hulle oorreed om eerder vir Pieter as Geheimhouer te gebruik in plaas van vir my . . . Dis my skuld, ek weet dit . . . Die nag toe hulle dood is, het ek gaan kyk of Pieter nog veilig is, maar toe ek by sy skuilplek kom, was hy weg. Daar was egter geen teken van 'n worsteling nie. Dit het nie reg gevoel nie. Ek het geskrik. Ek het dadelik na jou ouers se huis gegaan. Toe ek hul huis sien, verwoes, en hul liggame – het ek besef wat Pieter gedoen het. Wat ek gedoen het.”

Sy stem breek. Hy draai weg.

“Genoeg hiervan,” sê Lupin en daar is 'n ondertoon van staal in sy stem wat Harry nog nooit tevore gehoor het nie. “Daar is net een manier om te bewys wat regtig gebeur het. Ron, gee daardie rot hier.”

“Wat gaan jy met hom doen as ek hom vir jou gee?” vra Ron gespanne.

“Hom dwing om homself te wys,” sê Lupin. “As hy inderdaad 'n rot is, kan dit hom nie seermaak nie.”

Ron aarsel, toe hou hy uiteindelik vir Skille uit sodat Lupin hom kan vat. Skille begin dadelik onophoudelik piep. Hy spartel en spook en sy klein ogies peul by sy kop uit.

"Gereed, Sirius?" sê Lupin.

Swardt het Snerp se towerstaf reeds van die bed af opgetel. Hy stap nader aan Lupin en die spartelende rot, en dit lyk of sy oë in sy kop brand.

"Saam?" sê hy gedemp.

"Ek dink so," sê Lupin terwyl hy vir Skille styf in een hand vashou en sy towerstaf in die ander. "Ek tel drie. Een – twee – DRIE!"

'n Blouwit ligstraal skiet uit albei towerstawwe; vir 'n oomblik hang Skille asof bevrore in die lug, toe gaan sy klein swart liggaampie wild aan die kronkel – Ron skree – die rot val grond toe. Daar is nog 'n verblindende ligflits en toe –

Dis asof hulle na 'n film kyk van 'n boom wat teen hoë spoed groei. Die kop skiet dakwaarts vanuit die grond; ledemate spruit uit; die volgende oomblik staan 'n man waar Skille eens was. Hy krimp ineen en wring sy hande. Kromskeen spoeg en snou daar op die bed en die hare op sy rug staan orent.

Dit is 'n kort mannetjie, skaars langer as Harry en Hermien. Sy yl, kleurlose hare is onversorg en daar is 'n groot kaal kol op sy kop. Hy lyk soos 'n vet man wat in 'n kort tydjie 'n klomp gewig verloor het. Sy vel is vuilerig, baie soos Skille se pels, en iets van die rot bly huiwer om sy lang gepunte neus en om sy klein waterige ogies. Hy kyk van die een na die ander terwyl hy vinnig en vlak asemhaal. Harry sien hoe sy oë na die vloer en weer terug dartel.

"Wel, hallo, Pieter," sê Lupin vriendelik asof rotte gereeld in sy nabyheid in ou skoolvriende verander. "Lank laas gesien."

"S-Sirius . . . R-Remus . . ." Pansegrouw se stem is skril. Sy oë dartel opnuut na die deur. "My vriende . . . my ou vriende . . ."

Swardt lig sy towerstafarm, maar Lupin gryp hom aan die pols en kyk waarskuwend na hom. Toe draai hy terug na Pieter en sy stem is ongeërg en lig.

"Ons het 'n bietjie gesels, Pieter, oor alles wat gebeur het die nag toe James en Lily dood is. Jy het dalk die fynere puntjies gemis terwyl jy daar op die bed lê en piep het –"

"Remus," sê Pansegrouw hortend en Harry sien hoe druppels sweet op sy bleek gesig uitbars, "jy glo hom darem seker nie, of hoe . . . Hy wou my vermoor, Remus . . ."

"So het ons gehoor," sê Lupin koud. "Ek wil graag een of twee dingetjies met jou uitklaar, Pieter, as jy so gaaf sal wees –"

"Hy't gekom om my weer te probeer vermoor!" gil Pansegrouw skielik en wys na Swardt, en Harry sien dat hy sy middelvinger gebruik omdat hy nie 'n wysvinger het nie. "Hy't vir Lily en James doorgemaak en nou

wil hy my ook vermoor . . . Jy moet my help, Remus . . .”

Swardt se gesig lyk nou nog meer skeletagtig as tevore en met sy peillose oë gluur hy na Pansegrouw.

“Niemand gaan jou probeer doodmaak voor ons nie ’n paar dinge uitgesorteer het nie,” sê Lupin.

“Uitsorteer?” piep Pansegrouw en hy kyk wild om hom rond. Sy oë neem weer eens die toegespykerde vensters en die enigste deur in. “Ek het geweet hy gaan kom! Ek het geweet dat hy my sal kom soek! Ek wag al twaalf jaar dat dit moet gebeur!”

“Jy het geweet dat Sirius uit Azkaban gaan ontsnap?” sê Lupin met ’n frons. “Dit terwyl niemand anders dit nog ooit tevore reggekry het nie?”

“Hy het donker magte waaroor die res van ons net kan droom!” skree Pansegrouw skril. “Hoe anders het hy daar uitgekom? Ek veronderstel dat Hy Wat Nie Genoem Mag Word Nie hom ’n paar streke geleer het!”

Swardt begin lag, ’n aaklige, vreugdelose lag wat die hele vertrek vul.

“Woldemort my ’n paar streke leer?” sê hy.

Pansegrouw krimp ineen asof Swardt hom met ’n sweep gedreig het.

“Wat, bang om jou ou meester se naam te hoor?” sê Swardt. “Ek blaam jou nie, Pieter. Hy en sy volgeling is nie baie in hul skik met jou nie, is hulle?”

“Weet nie – waarvan jy praat nie, Sirius –” mompel Pansegrouw en sy asem kom nog vinniger. Sy hele gesig blink van die sweet.

“Jy het nie die laaste twaalf jaar vir my weggekrui nie,” sê Swardt. “Jy’t vir Woldemort se ondersteuners weggekrui. Ek het allerhande dinge in Azkaban gehoor, Pieter . . . Hulle dink almal dat jy dood is, anders sal jy verantwoording moet doen . . . Ek het hulle allerhande dinge in hul slaap hoor skreeu. Dit lyk asof hulle dink dat die verraaier ook vir hulle verraaie het. Woldemort het op jou aanbeveling na die Potters gegaan . . . en daar het Woldemort sy moses teëgekom. En nie al sy ondersteuners sit in Azkaban nie, of hoe? Daar is nog baie daar buite wat hul tyd afwag, wat maak asof hulle ingesien het hoe verkeerd hulle was . . . As hulle moet weet dat jy nog lewe, Pieter –”

“Weet nie . . . waarvan jy praat nie . . .” sê Pansegrouw weer, nog skriller as tevore. Hy vee sy gesig aan sy mou af en staar na Lupin. “Jy glo darem seker nie hierdie – hierdie malligheid nie, Remus –”

“Ek moet erken, Pieter, dat dit moeilik is om te verstaan hoekom ’n onskuldige man vir twaalf jaar ’n rot wil wees,” sê Lupin gelykmatig.

“Onskuldig, maar bang!” piep Pansegrouw. “As Woldemort se ondersteuners agter my aan is, is dit omdat ek een van hul beste manne in Azkaban laat beland het – die spioen, Sirius Swardt!”

Swardt se gesig is vertrek.

“Hoe durf jy,” grom hy, en skielik klink hy soos die beergrootte hond waarin hy kan verander. “Ek, ’n spioen vir Woldemort? Wanneer het ek

al ooit voor mense gekruip wat sterker en magtiger as ek is? Maar jy, Pieter – ek sal nooit verstaan hoekom ek nie van die begin af geweet het dat jy die spioen is nie. Jy het altyd van groot, sterk vriende gehou wat na jou kan omsien, of hoe? Eers was dit ons . . . ek en Remus . . . en James . . .”

Pansegrouw vee sy gesig opnuut af en hyg na asem.

“Ek, ’n spioen . . . jy moet van jou kop af wees . . . nooit . . . weet nie hoe jy so iets kan sê nie –”

“Lily en James het jou hul Geheimhouer gemaak omdat ek dit voorgestel het,” sis Swardt, en hy klink so giftig dat Pansegrouw ’n tree terugval. “Ek het gedink dat dit die volmaakte plan is . . . oëverblindery . . . Woldemort sal vir seker agter my aan kom, nie daarvan droom dat ons ’n vrotsige, talentlose misgewas soos jy sal gebruik nie . . . Dit moes die grootste oomblik van jou miserabele klein lewetjie gewees het toe jy vir Woldemort kon vertel dat jy die Potters aan hom kan uitlewer.”

Pansegrouw mompel afgetrokke; Harry hoor woorde soos “vergesog” en “malligheid”, maar hy kan nie anders as om Pansegrouw se asvaal ge-laaitskleur op te merk en die manier waarop sy oë aanhoudend na die deure en vensters dwaal nie.

“Professor Lupin?” sê Hermien huiwerig. “Kan – kan ek iets sê?”

“Seker, Hermien,” sê Lupin beleef.

“Wel – Skille – ek bedoel, hierdie – hierdie man – hy slaap al drie jaar in Harry se slaapsaal. As hy dan vir Jy-Weet-Wie gewerk het, hoekom het hy nog nooit vir Harry probeer seermaak nie?”

“Sien!” sê Pansegrouw skril en wys met sy verminkte hand na Hermien. “Dankiel! Sien jy, Remus? Ek het nie ’n haar op Harry se kop leed aangedoen nie! Waarom sou ek?”

“Ek sal jou sê waarom,” sê Swardt. “Omdat jy nooit iets vir enigiemand sal doen tensy dit vir jou voordeel inhou nie. Woldemort kruip reeds twaalf jaar weg, hulle sê hy is halfdood. Hoekom sal jy ’n moordpleeg, reg onder Albus Dompeldorius se neus, vir ’n wrak van ’n toewenaar wat al sy mag verloor het? Nee, jy sal seker wil wees dat hy die grootste boelie op die speelgrond is voor jy jou by hom skaar, of hoe? Hoekom anders het jy by ’n toewenaarsgesin gaan woon? Jy wou ’n oor op die grond hou vir nuus, of wat praat ek alles, Pieter? Net ingeval jou ou beskermheer sy kragte herwin en dit weer veilig is om by hom aan te sluit . . .”

Pansegrouw maak sy mond ’n paar keer oop en toe. Dit lyk asof hy die vermoë om te praat, verloor het.

“H’m – mnr. Swardt – Sirius?” sê Hermien skamerig.

Swardt skrik toe hy so aangespreek word en staar na Hermien asof hy lankal vergeet het hoe dit voel as iemand hoflik met jou praat.

“As u nie omgee dat ek vra nie – hoe het u sonder Donker Toorkuns uit Azkaban ontsnap?”

“Dankiel!” sê Pansegrouw weer terwyl hy na asem snak en sy kop soos ’n besetene knik. “Presies! Net wat ek wou –”

Lupin maak hom egter met een blik stil. Swardt frons effens vir Hermien, maar nie soos een wat vir haar kwaad is nie. Dit lyk eerder asof hy oor die vraag nadink.

“Ek weet nie eintlik hoe ek dit reggekry het nie,” sê hy peinsend. “Ek dink die enigste rede hoekom ek nie mal geword het nie, is omdat ek geweet het dat ek onskuldig is. Dit is nie ’n gelukkige gedagte nie, dus kon die Dementors dit nie uit my suig nie . . . Dit het my egter by my sinne gehou en my in staat gestel om te onthou wie ek is . . . my gehelp om my magte te behou . . . Wanneer alles . . . te erg geword het . . . het ek in my sel getransformeer . . . ’n hond geword. Dementors kan nie sien nie, weet julle . . .” Hy sluk. “Hulle voel waar mense is deur hul emosies op te vang . . . Hulle kon agterkom dat my emosies minder – minder menslik is, minder kompleks, wanneer ek ’n hond is . . . maar hulle het uit die aard van die saak gedink dat ek besig is om nes al die ander van my kop af te gaan, dus het dit hulle nie gepla nie. Ek was egter swak, baie swak, en nie in staat om hulle sonder ’n towerstaf van my af weg te dryf nie . . .”

“Toe sien ek vir Pieter in daardie foto . . . Ek het dadelik besef dat hy in Hogwarts saam met Harry is . . . in die perfekte posisie om op te tree by die geringste aanduiding dat die Donker Kant hul kragte herwin het . . .”

Pansegrouw skud sy kop en mompel geluidloos, maar hy staar die hele tyd soos ’n gehipnotiseerde na Swardt.

“ . . . gereed om toe te slaan die oomblik dat hy seker is dat hy bondgenote het . . . om die laaste Potter aan hulle uit te lewer. As hy Harry vir hulle kan gee, wie sal dit dan waag om te sê dat hy die heer Woldemort verraai het? Hy sal in eer terugverwelkom word . . .”

“Dus, soos jy kan sien, móes ek iets doen. Ek was die enigste een wat geweet het dat Pieter nog lewe . . .”

Skielik onthou Harry wat mnr. Weasley vir mev. Weasley gesê het. “Die wagte sê dat Swardt reeds ’n geruime tyd in sy slaap praat. Altyd dieselfde woorde: ‘Hy is by Hogwarts’ ”

“Dit was asof iemand ’n vuur in my kop aan die brand gestee het, ’n vuur wat die Dementors nie kon blus nie . . . dit was nie ’n gelukkige gevoel nie . . . dit was ’n obsessie . . . maar dit het my krag gegee, my verstand helder gemaak. Gevolglik het ek een nag toe hulle my deur oopgemaak het om vir my kos te bring, in die vorm van ’n hond verby hulle geglip . . . Dit is vir hulle net soveel moeiliker om ’n dier se emosies waar te neem, dat hulle verward was . . . ek was maer, brandmaer . . . maer genoeg om deur die tralies te kon glip . . . as ’n hond het ek terug land toe geswem . . . ek het noordwaarts gereis en Hogwarts se terrein as ’n hond betree . . . sedertdien het ek in die Woud gebly . . . behalwe wanneer ek na die Kwiddiekwedstryde kom kyk het . . . jy vlieg net so goed soos jou pa, Harry . . .”

Hy kyk na Harry, wat nie wegkyk nie.

"Glo my," sê Swardt hortend. "Glo my. Ek het nooit vir James en Lily verraaï nie. Ek sou sterf voor ek dit sou doen."

Uiteindelik kan Harry hom glo. Daar is so 'n groot knop in sy keel dat hy net kan knik.

"Nee!"

Pansegrouw het op sy knieë geval asof Harry se knik sy doodsvonnis onderteken het. Op sy knieë, met sy hande voor hom soos een wat bid, skuifel hy vorentoe.

"Sirius – dis ek . . . dis Pieter . . . jou vriend . . . jy sal tog nie . . ."

Swardt skop na hom en Pansegrouw deins terug.

"My kleed is vuil genoeg sonder dat jy daaraan hoef te raak," sê Swardt.

"Remus!" piep Pansegrouw, wend hom tot Lupin en kruip voor hom op die grond rond. "Jy glo dit darem seker nie . . . Sirius sou tog vir jou gesê het as hulle van plan verander het?"

"Nie as hy gedink het dat ek die spioen is nie, Pieter," sê Lupin. "Ek veronderstel dis hoekom jy nie vir my gesê het nie, Sirius?" sê hy ongeërg oor Pansegrouw se kop.

"Vergewe my, Remus," sê Swardt.

"Dis die minste, Kussingvoet, my maat," sê Lupin wat nou sy moue oprol. "Sal jy op jou beurt my vergewe omdat ek jou vir die spioen aangesien het?"

"Natuurlik," sê Swardt en 'n skaduwee van 'n glimlag speel oor sy vervalle gesig. Ook hy het begin om sy moue op te rol. "Sal ons hom saam takel?"

"Ja, ek dink so," sê Lupin grimmig.

"Julle gaan nie . . . julle gaan nie . . ." hyg Pansegrouw. Hy skarrel na Ron.

"Ron . . . ek was mos 'n goeie vriend . . . 'n goeie troeteldier? Jy sal nie dat hulle my doodmaak nie, Ron, sal jy . . . jy's aan my kant, of hoe?"

Ron gluur egter met die grootste walging na Pansegrouw.

"En ek het jou in my bed laat slaap!" sê hy.

"Gawe seun . . . gawe meester . . ." Pansegrouw kruip nader aan Ron, "jy sal nie dat hulle dit doen nie . . . ek was jou rot . . . ek was 'n goeie troeteldier . . ."

"As jy 'n beter rot as mens was, is dit nie iets om mee te koop te loop nie, Pieter," sê Swardt kwaai. Ron, wat nou nog bleker van pyn is, ruk sy gebreekte been tot buite Pansegrouw se bereik. Pansegrouw val op sy knieë, steier vorentoe en gryp na die soom van Hermien se kleed.

"Gawe dogter . . . slim dogter . . . jy – jy sal nie dat hulle . . . help my . . ."

Hermien is met afgryse vervul toe sy haar kleed uit Pansegrouw se hande pluk en tot teen die muur terugval.

Terwyl hy onbeheerbaar bewee, kniel Pansegrouw voor Harry en kyk stadig op in sy gesig.

"Harry . . . Harry . . . jy lyk net soos jou pa . . . net soos hy . . ."

"HOE DURF JY MET HARRY PRAAT?" brul Swardt. "HOE DURF JY IN SY GESIG KYK? HOE DURF JY VOOR HOM OOR JAMES PRAAT?"

"Harry," fluister Pansegrouw terwyl hy met sy hande uitgestrek voor hom nader skuifel, "Harry, James sou nie wou hê dat ek moet doodgaan nie . . . James sou verstaan het, Harry . . . hy sou genade betoon het . . ."

Sowel Swardt as Lupin tree vorentoe, gryp vir Pansegrouw aan die skouers en gooi hom agteroor op die vloer. Bewend van vrees staan hy na hulle.

"Jy het vir Lily en James aan Woldemort uitverkoop," sê Swardt ook bewend. "Ontken jy dit?"

Pansegrouw bars in trane uit. Dit is aaklig om te sien: hy lyk soos 'n oorgroeide kaalkopbaba wat ineengekrimp op die vloer lê.

"Sirius, Sirius, wat moes ek doen? Die Donker Heer . . . jy verstaan nie . . . hy het wapens wat jy jou nie kan voorstel nie . . . Ek was bang, Sirius, ek was nog nooit dapper soos jy en Remus en James nie. Ek wou nie hê dat dit moes gebeur nie . . . Hy Wat Nie Genoem Mag Word Nie het my gedwing –"

"MOENIE LIEG NIE!" bulder Swardt. "JY HET VIR TEN MINSTE 'N JAAR VOOR LILY EN JAMES SE DOOD VIR HOM NUUS AANGEDRA! JY WAS SY SPIOEN!"

"Hy – hy het orals oorgeneem!" sê Pansegrouw hortend. "W-wat sou dit my gebaat het om te weier?"

"Dink wat dit jou sou gebaat het as jy teen die boosaardigste towenaar wat nog ooit bestaan het, geveg het," sê Swardt met 'n vreeslike woede op sy gesig. "Onskuldige lewens sou gered gewees het, Pieter!"

"Julle verstaan nie!" kerm Pansegrouw. "Hy wou my doodmaak, Sirius!"

"DAN MOES JY DOODGEGAAN HET!" brul Swardt. "JY MOES GESTERF HET VOOR JY JOU VRIENDE VERRAAI HET, SOOS ONS VIR JOU SOU GESTERF HET!"

Swardt en Lupin staan skouer aan skouer met hul towerstawwe in die lug.

"Jy moes geweet het," sê Lupin sag, "dat as Woldemort jou nie doodmaak nie, dan sal ons dit doen. Tot siens, Pieter."

Hermien bedek haar gesig met haar hande en draai na die muur.

"NEE!" gil Harry. Hy hardloop vorentoe en gaan staan voor Pansegrouw, reg voor die towerstawwe. "Julle kan hom nie doodmaak nie," sê hy uitasem. "Julle kan net nie."

Sowel Swardt as Lupin lyk dronkgeslaan.

"Harry, hierdie stuk vuilgoed is die rede dat jy nie ouers het nie," grom

Swardt: "Hierdie kruiperige stuk vullis sal toekyk hoe jy doodgaan sonder om 'n oog te knip. Jy het gehoor wat hy sê. Sy eie stinkende bas het meer vir hom beteken as jou hele familie."

"Ek weet," hyg Harry. "Ons sal hom kasteel toe neem. Ons sal hom vir die Dementors gee. Hy kan Azkaban toe gaan . . . moet hom net nie doodmaak nie."

"Harry!" snak Pansegrouw en slinger sy arms om Harry se knieë. "Jy – dankie – dis meer as wat ek verdien – dankie –"

"Los my," spoeg Harry en gooi Pansegrouw se hande vol wrewel van hom af. "Ek doen dit nie vir jou nie. Ek doen dit omdat ek dink dat my pa nie sou wou hê dat sy beste vriende oor jou moordenaars moet wees nie."

Niemand beweeg of maak 'n geluid nie, behalwe Pansegrouw wie se asem in sy bors fluit. Swardt en Lupin kyk na mekaar. Dan, in een beweging, laat sak hulle hul towerstawwe.

"Jy is die enigste mens met die reg om te besluit, Harry," sê Swardt. "Maar dink . . . dink aan wat hy gedoen het . . ."

"Hy kan Azkaban toe gaan," herhaal Harry. "As enigiemand dit verdien, dan's dit hy . . ."

Pansegrouw se asem fluit nog steeds in sy keel.

"Goed dan," sê Lupin. "Staan opsy, Harry."

Harry aarsel.

"Ek gaan hom vasmaak," sê Lupin. "Dis al, ek sweer."

Harry beweeg uit die pad. Dun koorde skiet uit Lupin se towerstaf en die volgende oomblik wriemel Pansegrouw op die vloer, stewig vasgebond en genuilband.

"Waag dit net om te transformeer, Pieter," grom Swardt terwyl sy towerstaf opnuut na Pansegrouw wys, "dan sal ons jou doodmaak. Stem jy saam, Harry?"

Harry kyk af na die patetiese figuur op die vloer en knik sodat Pansegrouw dit kan sien.

"Goed," sê Lupin skielik saaklik. "Ron, ek kan bene nie naastenby so goed soos Madame Pomfrey regmaak nie, dus dink ek dis beter om jou been te spalk tot tyd en wyl jy in die siekeboeg kom."

Hy haas hom na Ron, buk, tik met sy towerstaf teen Ron se been en mompel, "*Ferula*." Verbande draai vanself om Ron se been en bind dit styf aan 'n spalk vas. Lupin help hom orent. Sonder om 'n spier te verrek, laat rus Ron sy gewig versigtig op sy been.

"Dis beter," sê hy. "Dankie."

"Wat van professor Snerp?" sê Hermien in 'n klein stemmetjie terwyl sy na Snerp se uitgestrekte figuur kyk.

"Daar's niks ernstigs met hom verkeerd nie," sê Lupin terwyl hy oor Snerp buig en sy pols neem. "Julle was net 'n bietjie – oorgretig. Hy's nog

steeds katswink. H'm – dis dalk beter om hom eers by te bring wanneer ons veilig in die kasteel is. Ons kan hom net so neem

Hy mompel, "*Mobillicorpus*." Snerp kom orent in 'n staande posisie as of onsigbare drade aan sy gewrigte, nek en knieë gebind is. Sy kop rol egter nog steeds onplesierig, soos 'n groteske pop s'n, rond. Hy sweef 'n paar sentimeters bo die grond sodat sy voete slap in die lug hang. Lupin tel die onsigbaarheidsmantel op en druk dit in sy sak.

"Twee van ons behoort hieraan vasgemaak te word," sê Swardt en druk teen Pansegrouw met sy toon. "Net om seker te maak."

"Ek sal," sê Lupin.

"Ek ook," sê Ron en hink nader.

Swardt tower swaar boeie uit die lug uit op en spoedig staan Pansegrouw ook regop met sy linkerhand aan Lupin se regterarm en sy regterhand aan Ron se linker vasgeboei. Ron se gesig is vasberade. Dit lyk asof hy Skille se verraad as 'n persoonlike belediging beskou. Kromskeen wip ligvoets van die bed af en met sy borselstert hoog in die lug, lei hy hulle uit die vertrek.

CHAPTER TWENTY



THE DEMENTOR'S KISS

Harry had never been part of a stranger group. Crookshanks led the way down the stairs; Lupin, Pettigrew, and Ron went next, looking like entrants in a six-legged race. Next came Professor Snape, drifting creepily along, his toes hitting each stair as they descended, held up by his own wand, which was being pointed at him by Sirius. Harry and Hermione brought up the rear.

Getting back into the tunnel was difficult. Lupin, Pettigrew, and Ron had to turn sideways to manage it; Lupin still had Pettigrew covered with his wand. Harry could see them edging awkwardly along the tunnel in single file. Crookshanks was still in the lead. Harry went right after Sirius, who was still making Snape drift along ahead of them; he kept bumping his lolling head on the low ceiling.

Harry had the impression Sirius was making no effort to prevent this.

“You know what this means?” Sirius said abruptly to Harry as they made their slow progress along the tunnel. “Turning Pettigrew in?”

“You’re free,” said Harry.

“Yes . . .,” said Sirius. “But I’m also — I don’t know if anyone ever told you — I’m your godfather.”

“Yeah, I knew that,” said Harry.

“Well . . . your parents appointed me your guardian,” said Sirius stiffly. “If anything happened to them . . .”

Harry waited. Did Sirius mean what he thought he meant?

“I’ll understand, of course, if you want to stay with your aunt and uncle,” said Sirius. “But . . . well . . . think about it. Once my name’s cleared . . . if you wanted a . . . a different home . . .”

Some sort of explosion took place in the pit of Harry’s stomach.

“What — live with you?” he said, accidentally cracking his head on a bit of rock protruding from the ceiling. “Leave the Dursleys?”

“Of course, I thought you wouldn’t want to,” said Sirius quickly. “I understand, I just thought I’d —”

“Are you insane?” said Harry, his voice easily as croaky as Sirius’s. “Of course I want to leave the Dursleys! Have you got a house? When can I move in?”

Sirius turned right around to look at him; Snape’s head was scraping the ceiling but Sirius didn’t seem to care.

“You want to?” he said. “You mean it?”

“Yeah, I mean it!” said Harry.

Sirius’s gaunt face broke into the first true smile Harry had seen

upon it. The difference it made was startling, as though a person ten years younger were shining through the starved mask; for a moment, he was recognizable as the man who had laughed at Harry's parents' wedding.

They did not speak again until they had reached the end of the tunnel. Crookshanks darted up first; he had evidently pressed his paw to the knot on the trunk, because Lupin, Pettigrew, and Ron clambered upward without any sound of savaging branches.

Sirius saw Snape up through the hole, then stood back for Harry and Hermione to pass. At last, all of them were out.

The grounds were very dark now; the only light came from the distant windows of the castle. Without a word, they set off. Pettigrew was still wheezing and occasionally whimpering. Harry's mind was buzzing. He was going to leave the Dursleys. He was going to live with Sirius Black, his parents' best friend. . . . He felt dazed. . . . What would happen when he told the Dursleys he was going to live with the convict they'd seen on television?

"One wrong move, Peter," said Lupin threateningly ahead. His wand was still pointed sideways at Pettigrew's chest.

Silently they tramped through the grounds, the castle lights growing slowly larger. Snape was still drifting weirdly ahead of Sirius, his chin bumping on his chest. And then —

A cloud shifted. There were suddenly dim shadows on the ground. Their party was bathed in moonlight.

Snape collided with Lupin, Pettigrew, and Ron, who had stopped abruptly. Sirius froze. He flung out one arm to make Harry and Hermione stop.

Harry could see Lupin's silhouette. He had gone rigid. Then his limbs began to shake.

"Oh, my —" Hermione gasped. "He didn't take his potion tonight! He's not safe!"

"Run," Sirius whispered. "Run. Now."

But Harry couldn't run. Ron was chained to Pettigrew and Lupin. He leapt forward but Sirius caught him around the chest and threw him back.

"Leave it to me — RUN!"

There was a terrible snarling noise. Lupin's head was lengthening. So was his body. His shoulders were hunching. Hair was sprouting visibly on his face and hands, which were curling into clawed paws. Crookshanks's hair was on end again; he was backing away —

As the werewolf reared, snapping its long jaws, Sirius disappeared from Harry's side. He had transformed. The enormous, bearlike dog bounded forward. As the werewolf wrenched itself free of the manacle binding it, the dog seized it about the neck and pulled it backward, away from Ron and Pettigrew. They were locked, jaw to jaw, claws ripping at each other —

Harry stood, transfixed by the sight, too intent upon the battle to notice anything else. It was Hermione's scream that alerted him —

Pettigrew had dived for Lupin's dropped wand. Ron, unsteady on his bandaged leg, fell. There was a bang, a burst of light — and Ron lay motionless on the ground. Another bang — Crookshanks flew into the air and back to the earth in a heap.

"*Expelliarmus!*" Harry yelled, pointing his own wand at Pettigrew; Lupin's wand flew high into the air and out of sight. "Stay

where you are!” Harry shouted, running forward.

Too late. Pettigrew had transformed. Harry saw his bald tail whip through the manacle on Ron’s outstretched arm and heard a scurrying through the grass.

There was a howl and a rumbling growl; Harry turned to see the werewolf taking flight; it was galloping into the forest —

“Sirius, he’s gone, Pettigrew transformed!” Harry yelled.

Sirius was bleeding; there were gashes across his muzzle and back, but at Harry’s words he scrambled up again, and in an instant, the sound of his paws faded to silence as he pounded away across the grounds.

Harry and Hermione dashed over to Ron.

“What did he do to him?” Hermione whispered. Ron’s eyes were only half-closed, his mouth hung open; he was definitely alive, they could hear him breathing, but he didn’t seem to recognize them.

“I don’t know. . . .”

Harry looked desperately around. Black and Lupin both gone, they had no one but Snape for company, still hanging, unconscious, in midair.

“We’d better get them up to the castle and tell someone,” said Harry, pushing his hair out of his eyes, trying to think straight. “Come —”

But then, from beyond the range of their vision, they heard a yelping, a whining; a dog in pain. . . .

“Sirius,” Harry muttered, staring into the darkness.

He had a moment’s indecision, but there was nothing they could do for Ron at the moment, and by the sound of it, Black was in trouble

Harry set off at a run, Hermione right behind him. The yelping seemed to be coming from near the lake. They pelted toward it, and Harry, running flat out, felt the cold without realizing what it must mean —

The yelping stopped abruptly. As they reached the lakeshore, they saw why — Sirius had turned back into a man. He was crouched on all fours, his hands over his head.

"Nooo," he moaned. "Noooo . . . please. . . ."

And then Harry saw them. Dementors, at least a hundred of them, gliding in a black mass around the lake toward them. He spun around, the familiar, icy cold penetrating his insides, fog starting to obscure his vision; more were appearing out of the darkness on every side; they were encircling them . . .

"Hermione, think of something happy!" Harry yelled, raising his wand, blinking furiously to try and clear his vision, shaking his head to rid it of the faint screaming that had started inside it —

I'm going to live with my godfather. I'm leaving the Dursleys.

He forced himself to think of Sirius, and only Sirius, and began to chant: *"Expecto Patronum! Expecto Patronum!"*

Black gave a shudder, rolled over, and lay motionless on the ground, pale as death.

He'll be all right. I'm going to go and live with him.

"Expecto Patronum! Hermione, help me! Expecto Patronum!"

"Expecto —" Hermione whispered, "Expecto — Expecto —"

But she couldn't do it. The dementors were closing in, barely ten feet from them. They formed a solid wall around Harry and

Hermione, and were getting closer. . . .

"EXPECTO PATRONUM!" Harry yelled, trying to blot the screaming from his ears. *"EXPECTO PATRONUM!"*

A thin wisp of silver escaped his wand and hovered like mist before him. At the same moment, Harry felt Hermione collapse next to him. He was alone . . . completely alone. . . .

"Expecto — Expecto Patronum —"

Harry felt his knees hit the cold grass. Fog was clouding his eyes. With a huge effort, he fought to remember — Sirius was innocent — innocent — *We'll be okay — I'm going to live with him —*

"Expecto Patronum!" he gasped.

By the feeble light of his formless Patronus, he saw a dementor halt, very close to him. It couldn't walk through the cloud of silver mist Harry had conjured. A dead, slimy hand slid out from under the cloak. It made a gesture as though to sweep the Patronus aside.

"No — no —" Harry gasped. *"He's innocent . . . Expecto — Expecto Patronum —"*

He could feel them watching him, hear their rattling breath like an evil wind around him. The nearest dementor seemed to be considering him. Then it raised both its rotting hands — and lowered its hood.

Where there should have been eyes, there was only thin, gray, scabbed skin, stretched blankly over empty sockets. But there was a mouth . . . a gaping, shapeless hole, sucking the air with the sound of a death rattle.

A paralyzing terror filled Harry so that he couldn't move or speak. His Patronus flickered and died.

White fog was blinding him. He had to fight . . . *Expecto Patronum* . . . he couldn't see . . . and in the distance, he heard the familiar screaming . . . *Expecto Patronum* . . . he groped in the mist for Sirius, and found his arm . . . they weren't going to take him.

But a pair of strong, clammy hands suddenly attached themselves around Harry's neck. They were forcing his face upward. . . . He could feel its breath. . . . It was going to get rid of him first. . . . He could feel its putrid breath. . . . His mother was screaming in his ears. . . . She was going to be the last thing he ever heard —

And then, through the fog that was drowning him, he thought he saw a silvery light growing brighter and brighter. . . . He felt himself fall forward onto the grass —

Facedown, too weak to move, sick and shaking, Harry opened his eyes. The dementor must have released him. The blinding light was illuminating the grass around him. . . . The screaming had stopped, the cold was ebbing away. . . .

Something was driving the dementors back. . . . It was circling around him and Sirius and Hermione. . . . The rattling, sucking sounds of the dementors were fading. They were leaving. . . . The air was warm again. . . .

With every ounce of strength he could muster, Harry raised his head a few inches and saw an animal amid the light, galloping away across the lake. . . . Eyes blurred with sweat, Harry tried to make out what it was. . . . It was as bright as a unicorn. . . . Fighting to stay conscious, Harry watched it canter to a halt as it reached the opposite shore. For a moment, Harry saw, by its brightness, somebody welcoming it back . . . raising his hand to pat it . . . someone who

looked strangely familiar . . . but it couldn't be . . .

Harry didn't understand. He couldn't think anymore. He felt the last of his strength leave him, and his head hit the ground as he fainted.

Die Dementorskus

Harry was nog nooit deel van 'n meer eenaardige prosessie nie. Kromskeen loop eerste met die trappe af ondertoe; Lupin, Pansegrouw en Ron, wat lyk asof hulle aan 'n sesbeenresies deelneem, volg op sy hakke. Dan sweef professor Snerp op spookagtige wyse met die trappe af, sodat sy tone teen elke treetjie kap. Hy word regop gehou deur sy eie towerstaf wat Sirius op hom gerig hou. Harry en Hermien vorm die agterhoede.

Hulle kom met groot moeite terug in die tunnel. Lupin, Pansegrouw en Ron moet sywaarts draai om deur te kom; Lupin dek nog steeds vir Pansegrouw met sy towerstaf. Harry sien hoe hulle skeef-skeef agter mekaar met die tunnel langs sukkel. Kromskeen loop nog steeds voor. Harry loop reg agter Sirius wat vir Snerp voor hulle uit laat sweef. Snerp kap sy kop aanhoudend teen die lae dak en Harry kry die indruk dat Sirius nie juis probeer om dit te verhoed nie.

“Jy weet natuurlik wat dit alles beteken?” sê Sirius skielik vir Harry terwyl hulle stadig met die tunnel langs stap. “As ons vir Pansegrouw uitgelewer het?”

“Dan is jy vry,” sê Harry.

“Ja . . .” sê Sirius, “maar ek is ook – ek weet nie of iemand dit ooit vir jou gesê het nie – maar ek is jou peetpa.”

“Ja, ek weet dit,” sê Harry.

“Wel . . . jou ouers het my ook as jou voog aangestel,” sê Sirius stywerig. “As enigiets met hulle sou gebeur . . .”

Harry wag. Bedoel Sirius wat hy dink hy bedoel?

“Ek sal natuurlik verstaan as jy eerder by jou oom en tante wil bly,” sê Sirius. “Maar . . . wel . . . dink daaroor. As my naam eers skoon is . . . as jy dalk 'n ander huis sou soek . . .”

'n Soort ontploffing gebeur in die krop van Harry se maag.

“Wat – by jou kom bly?” sê hy en stamp sy kop per ongeluk teen 'n uitstaande rots in die plafon. “Weggaan van die Dursleys af?”

“Ek het natuurlik nie verwag dat jy sommer sal wil nie,” sê Sirius vinig. “Ek verstaan heeltemal. Ek het net gedink dat as –”

“Is jy mal?” sê Harry en sy stem is feitlik net so skor soos Sirius s'n.

“Natuurlik wil ek van die Dursleys af weggaan! Het jy ’n huis? Wanneer kan ek kom?”

Sirius draai om en kyk na hom; Snerp se kop skraap teen die plafon maar dit lyk nie of Sirius juis omgee nie.

“Jy wil?” sê hy. “Bedoel jy dit?”

“Natuurlik bedoel ek dit!” sê Harry.

Sirius se vervalte gesig breek oop in die eerste ware glimlag wat Harry nog ooit daarop gesien het. Die verskil wat dit maak, is verstommend. Dis of ’n persoon wat tien jaar jonger is skielik deur die uitgehongerde masker straal; vir ’n oomblik is hy herkenbaar as die man wat so lekker op Harry se ouers se troudag gelag het.

Hulle praat nie weer voor hulle die einde van die tunnel bereik het nie. Kromskeen skarrel eerste boontoe; hy moet met sy poot aan die kwas in die stam geraak het, want Lupin, Pansegrouw en Ron kan boontoe klouter sonder dat die geluid van verwoede takke gehoor kan word.

Sirius help vir Snerp deur die gat en staan dan terug sodat Harry en Hermien kan deurklim. Uiteindelik is hulle almal buite.

Teen dié tyd is die terrein baie donker en die enigste lig val van ver deur die kasteel se vensters. Sonder ’n woord stap hulle aan. Pansegrouw se asem fluit nog steeds aamborstig in sy keel en nou en dan maak hy ’n kermgeluidjie. Harry se brein is aan die draai. Hy kan weggaan van die Dursleys af. Hy kan by Sirius Swardt gaan bly, sy pa se beste vriend . . . hy voel dronkgeslaan . . . Hoe lekker gaan dit nie wees om vir die Dursleys te vertel dat hy voortaan by die misdadiger wat hulle op televisie gesien het, gaan woon nie!

“Net een verkeerde beweging, Pieter,” sê Lupin dreigend van voor af. Sy towerstaf wys nog steeds na Pansegrouw se borskas.

Hulle stap in stilte oor die terrein terwyl die kasteel se ligte stadigaan al groter word. Snerp sweef nog steeds met sy ken op sy bors spookagtig voor Sirius. En toe –

’n Wolk beweeg. Dowwe skaduwees val meteens oor die grond. Die hele geselskap is in maanlig gebaai.

Snerp bots teen Lupin, Pansegrouw en Ron wat eensklaps vasgesteek het. Sirius vries. Hy gooi sy arm uit sodat Harry en Hermien ook moet vassteek.

Harry kan Lupin se buitelyn sien. Hy het stokstyf geword. Toe begin sy ledemate skud.

“O, nee –” sê Hermien en snak na asem. “Hy het nie vannag sy Towerdrankie gedrink nie! Hy’s nie veilig nie!”

“Hardloop,” fluister Sirius. “Hardloop! Dadelik!”

Harry kan egter nie hardloop nie. Ron is aan Pansegrouw en Lupin vasgeketting. Hy spring vorentoe, maar Sirius gryp hom om die lyf en slinger hom agtertoe.

“Los dit vir my – HARDLOOP!”

’n Aaklige gromgeluid klink op. Lupin se kop is besig om langer te word. So ook sy liggaam. Sy skouers vou vooroor. Sigbare hare spruit uit sy gesig en hande wat omkrul en in kloue met naels verander. Kromskeen se hare staan orent en hy tree stadig terug –

Toe die weerwolf met klappende kake orent kom, is Sirius nie meer langs Harry nie. Hy het getransformeer. Die enorme beeragtige hond spring vorentoe. Toe die weerwolf homself uit die boeie losskeur, gryp die hond hom aan die nek en pluk hom terug, weg van Ron en Pansegrouw af. Bek teen bek val hulle vas met kloue wat na mekaar kap –

Harry is versteen deur wat gebeur, te verdiep in die stryd om enigiets anders op te let. Dit is Hermien se kreet wat hom laat wakker skrik –

Pansegrouw het na die towerstaf wat Lupin laat val het, geduik. Ron, onvas op sy gebreekte been, slaan neer. Daar is ’n klapgeluid, ’n ontplof-fing van lig – en Ron bly bewegingloos lê. Nog ’n klap – Kromskeen vlieg deur die lug en val in ’n hoop op die grond.

“Expelliarmus!” gil Harry en rig sy towerstaf op Pansegrouw; Lupin se towerstaf trek hoog die lug in en verdwyn uit sig. “Bly waar jy is!” gil Harry en hardloop vorentoe.

Dit is te laat. Pansegrouw het getransformeer. Harry sien hoe sy kaal stert deur die boeie om Ron se uitgestrekte arm glip en hoor hoe hy deur die gras skarrel.

’n Wolwegehuil en ’n rammelende gegrom klink op. Harry draai om en sien hoe die weerwolf op vlug slaan en die Woud binnegalop –

“Sirius, hy’s weg, Pansegrouw het getransformeer!” gil Harry.

Sirius bloei; daar is diep snye aan sy snoet en op sy rug, maar toe hy Harry se woorde hoor, steier hy onmiddellik orent en binne oomblikke kan die geluid van sy pote gehoor word soos hy in die verte verdwyn.

Harry en Hermien storm op Ron af.

“Wat het hy aan Ron gedoen?” fluister Hermien. Ron se oë is halftoe en sy mond hang oop. Hy lewe beslis nog; hulle kan hoor hoe hy asemhaal, maar dit lyk nie of hy hulle herken nie.

“Ek weet nie.”

Harry kyk benoud om hom. Sowel Swardt as Lupin is vort . . . hulle het net vir Snerp by hulle en hy hang nog steeds half bewusteloos in die lug.

“Ons moet hom kasteel toe neem en vir iemand gaan sê,” sê Harry terwyl hy die hare uit sy oë stoot en sy bes doen om helder te dink. “Kom –”

In die duisternis hoor hulle skielik ’n tjankende gekerm, ’n hond wat in pyn is . . .

“Sirius,” mompel Harry en staar die donkerte in.

Vir ’n oomblik twyfel hy, maar daar is niks wat hulle op hierdie oomblik vir Ron kan doen nie, en dit klink asof Swardt in die moeilikheid is – Harry begin hardloop, met Hermien agterna. Dis of die getjank van

iewers naby die meer kom. Hulle laat vat soontoe en Harry, wat voluit hardloop, voel die koue sonder dat dit tot hom deurdring wat dit is –

Die gekerm het net so onverwags weer opgehou. Toe hulle by die kant van die meer kom, sien hulle hoekom – Sirius het terug in 'n mens verander. Hy staan vooroor gehurk met sy hande oor sy ore.

“Neeee,” kerm hy. “Asseblief . . . neeeee . . .”

Toe sien Harry hulle. Ten minste 'n honderd Dementors wat in 'n swart massa om die meer op hulle afgly. Terwyl die bekende ysige koue deur sy binneste dring, swaai hy om. Dis so mistig dat hy skaars kan sien; nog meer van hulle verskyn vanuit die duisternis aan alle kante; hulle omsingel hom . . .

“Hermien; dink aan iets gelukkigs!” gil Harry terwyl hy sy towerstaf lig. Hy knipper sy oë wild om beter te kan sien en skud sy kop in 'n poging om van die dowwe geskree wat daarin begin het, ontslae te raak –

“Ek gaan by my peetpa bly. Ek gaan weg van die Dursleys af.”

Hy dwing homself om aan Sirius te dink en net aan Sirius en begin sê: “Expecto patronum! Expecto patronum!”

Swardt sidder, rol om en bly bewegingloos op die grond lê. Hy is so bleek soos die dood.

Hy gaan oukei wees. Ek gaan by hom woon.

“Expecto patronum! Hermien, help my! Expecto patronum!”

“Expecto –” fluister Hermien, “expecto – expecto –”

Sy kry dit egter nie reg nie. Die Dementors kom al nader tot hulle skaars tien tree van Harry-hulle af is. Hulle vorm 'n soliede muur wat nader en nader om Harry en Hermien beweeg . . .

“EXPECTO PATRONUM!” gil Harry, terwyl hy die geskree in sy ore probeer afweer. “EXPECTO PATRONUM!”

'n Dun silwer warreling ontsnap uit sy towerstaf en huiwer soos mis voor hom. Op daardie selfde oomblik voel Harry hoe Hermien langs hom op die grond neersyg. Hy is alleen . . . heeltemal alleen . . .

“Expecto – expecto patronum –”

Harry voel hoe hy op die koue gras op sy knieë neersink. Walms mis warrel soos wolke voor sy oë verby. Met 'n geweldige inspanning veg hy om die gedagte te onthou – Sirius is onskuldig – onskuldig – ons is oukei – ek gaan by hom woon –

“Expecto patronum!” sê hy hygend.

In die flou lig van sy vormlose Patronus sien hy hoe 'n Dementor baie na aan hom gaan staan. Dit kan nie deur die wolk silwer lig wat Harry opgetower het, loop nie. 'n Dooie, slymerige hand gly onder sy kleed uit. Dit maak 'n beweging asof dit die Patronus uit die pad wil vee.

“Nee – nee –” stamel Harry. “Hy's onskuldig . . . expecto – expecto patronum –”

Hy sien hoe hulle na hom draai, hoor die roggelende asemhaling soos

'n boosaardige wind oral om hom. Dit lyk of die Dementor naaste aan hom oor hom dink. Dan lig hy albei sy verrottende hande – en stoot sy kap terug.

Waar daar oë moet wees, is bloot 'n dun, grys, skubberige vel wat styf oor leë oogkasse gespan is. Daar is wel 'n mond . . . 'n gapende, vormlose gat wat die lug met 'n doodsgeroggel insuig.

'n Verlammente vrees vervul Harry sodat hy nie kan roer of praat nie. Sy Patronus flikker en gaan dood.

Wit mis verblind hom. Hy moet daarteen veg . . . *expecto patronum* hy kan nie sien nie . . . in die verte hoor hy die bekende geskree . . . *expecto patronum* . . . hy voel-voel deur die mis na Sirius, vat sy arm raak hulle gaan hom nie wegvat nie . . .

'n Paar sterk, klam hande vou skielik om Harry se nek en dwing sy kop boontoe . . . hy voel die asem . . . dit gaan eerste van hom ontslae raak . . . hy ruik die stinkende asem . . . sy ma skree in sy ore . . . dit gaan die laaste ding wees wat hy ooit hoor –

En toe, deur die mis waarin hy dreig om te verdrink, verbeel hy hom dat hy 'n silwer lig sien wat helderder en helderder word . . . Hy voel hoe hy vooroor op die gras val.

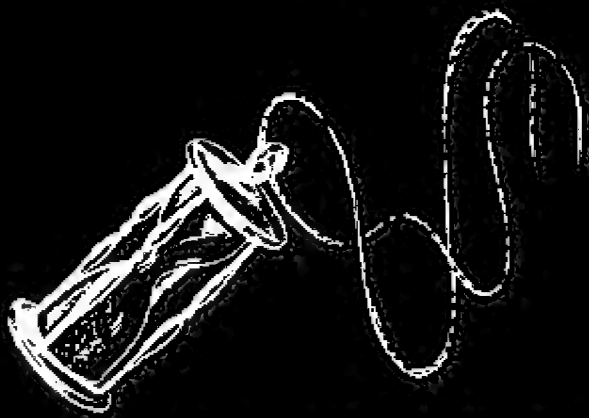
Met sy gesig na onder, te swak om te beweeg, naar en bewend, maak Harry sy oë oop. Die verblindende lig verlig die gras om hom . . . Die geskree het opgehou, die koue is besig om weg te vloei . . .

Iets is besig om die Dementors weg te dryf . . . dit sirkel om hom en Sirius en Hermien . . . die roggelende suiggeluide van die Dementors word dowwer. Hulle gee pad . . . die lug word weer warm . . .

Harry moet elke greintjie krag tot sy beskikking inspan om sy kop 'n entjie bo die grond te lig. Hy sien 'n dier wat teen die lig oor die meer galop. Harry se oë is dof van die sweet, maar hy doen sy bes om uit te maak wat dit is . . . dit skitter so helder soos 'n eenhoring. Harry moet veg om by sy bewussyn te bly. Hy sien hoe die dier oorgaan op 'n kort galop en dan aan die oorkant van die meer tot stilstand kom. Vir 'n oomblik kan Harry in die helder lig sien hoe iemand dit terugverwelkom . . . sy hand lig en dit streel . . . iemand wat vreemd bekend lyk . . . dit kan tog nie wees nie . . .

Harry verstaan glad nie wat aangaan nie. Hy kan nie meer dink nie. Hy voel hoe die laaste bietjie krag uit hom vloei. Sy kop tref die grond toe hy sy bewussyn verloor.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE



HERMIONE'S SECRET

Shocking business . . . shocking . . . miracle none of them died . . . never heard the like . . . by thunder, it was lucky you were there, Snape. . . .”

“Thank you, Minister.”

“Order of Merlin, Second Class, I’d say. First Class, if I can wangle it!”

“Thank you very much indeed, Minister.”

“Nasty cut you’ve got there. . . . Black’s work, I suppose?”

“As a matter of fact, it was Potter, Weasley, and Granger, Minister. . . .”

“No!”

“Black had bewitched them, I saw it immediately. A Confundus Charm, to judge by their behavior. They seemed to think there was a

possibility he was innocent. They weren't responsible for their actions. On the other hand, their interference might have permitted Black to escape. . . . They obviously thought they were going to catch Black single-handed. They've got away with a great deal before now. . . . I'm afraid it's given them a rather high opinion of themselves . . . and of course Potter has always been allowed an extraordinary amount of license by the headmaster —”

“Ah, well, Snape . . . Harry Potter, you know . . . we've all got a bit of a blind spot where he's concerned.”

“And yet — is it good for him to be given so much special treatment? Personally, I try and treat him like any other student. And any other student would be suspended — at the very least — for leading his friends into such danger. Consider, Minister — against all school rules — after all the precautions put in place for his protection — out-of-bounds, at night, consorting with a werewolf and a murderer — and I have reason to believe he has been visiting Hogsmeade illegally too —”

“Well, well . . . we shall see, Snape, we shall see. . . . The boy has undoubtedly been foolish. . . .”

Harry lay listening with his eyes tight shut. He felt very groggy. The words he was hearing seemed to be traveling very slowly from his ears to his brain, so that it was difficult to understand. . . . His limbs felt like lead; his eyelids too heavy to lift. . . . He wanted to lie here, on this comfortable bed, forever. . . .

“What amazes me most is the behavior of the dementors . . . you've really no idea what made them retreat, Snape?”

“No, Minister . . . by the time I had come 'round they were heading

back to their positions at the entrances. . . .”

“Extraordinary. And yet Black, and Harry, and the girl —”

“All unconscious by the time I reached them. I bound and gagged Black, naturally, conjured stretchers, and brought them all straight back to the castle.”

There was a pause. Harry’s brain seemed to be moving a little faster, and as it did, a gnawing sensation grew in the pit of his stomach. . . .

He opened his eyes.

Everything was slightly blurred. Somebody had removed his glasses. He was lying in the dark hospital wing. At the very end of the ward, he could make out Madam Pomfrey with her back to him, bending over a bed. Harry squinted. Ron’s red hair was visible beneath Madam Pomfrey’s arm.

Harry moved his head over on the pillow. In the bed to his right lay Hermione. Moonlight was falling across her bed. Her eyes were open too. She looked petrified, and when she saw that Harry was awake, pressed a finger to her lips, then pointed to the hospital wing door. It was ajar, and the voices of Cornelius Fudge and Snape were coming through it from the corridor outside.

Madam Pomfrey now came walking briskly up the dark ward to Harry’s bed. He turned to look at her. She was carrying the largest block of chocolate he had ever seen in his life. It looked like a small boulder.

“Ah, you’re awake!” she said briskly. She placed the chocolate on Harry’s bedside table and began breaking it apart with a small hammer.

“How’s Ron?” said Harry and Hermione together.

“He’ll live,” said Madam Pomfrey grimly. “As for you two . . . you’ll be staying here until I’m satisfied you’re — Potter, what do you think you’re doing?”

Harry was sitting up, putting his glasses back on, and picking up his wand.

“I need to see the headmaster,” he said.

“Potter,” said Madam Pomfrey soothingly, “it’s all right. They’ve got Black. He’s locked away upstairs. The dementors will be performing the Kiss any moment now —”

“WHAT?”

Harry jumped up out of bed; Hermione had done the same. But his shout had been heard in the corridor outside; next second, Cornelius Fudge and Snape had entered the ward.

“Harry, Harry, what’s this?” said Fudge, looking agitated. “You should be in bed — has he had any chocolate?” he asked Madam Pomfrey anxiously.

“Minister, listen!” Harry said. “Sirius Black’s innocent! Peter Pettigrew faked his own death! We saw him tonight! You can’t let the dementors do that thing to Sirius, he’s —”

But Fudge was shaking his head with a small smile on his face.

“Harry, Harry, you’re very confused, you’ve been through a dreadful ordeal, lie back down, now, we’ve got everything under control. . . .”

“YOU HAVEN’T!” Harry yelled. “YOU’VE GOT THE WRONG MAN!”

“Minister, listen, please,” Hermione said; she had hurried to

Harry's side and was gazing imploringly into Fudge's face. "I saw him too. It was Ron's rat, he's an Animagus, Pettigrew, I mean, and —"

"You see, Minister?" said Snape. "Confunded, both of them. . . . Black's done a very good job on them. . . ."

"WE'RE NOT CONFUNDED!" Harry roared.

"Minister! Professor!" said Madam Pomfrey angrily. "I must insist that you leave. Potter is my patient, and he should not be distressed!"

"I'm not distressed, I'm trying to tell them what happened!" Harry said furiously. "If they'd just listen —"

But Madam Pomfrey suddenly stuffed a large chunk of chocolate into Harry's mouth; he choked, and she seized the opportunity to force him back onto the bed.

"Now, *please*, Minister, these children need care. Please leave —"

The door opened again. It was Dumbledore. Harry swallowed his mouthful of chocolate with great difficulty and got up again.

"Professor Dumbledore, Sirius Black —"

"For heaven's sake!" said Madam Pomfrey hysterically. "Is this a hospital wing or not? Headmaster, I must insist —"

"My apologies, Poppy, but I need a word with Mr. Potter and Miss Granger," said Dumbledore calmly. "I have just been talking to Sirius Black —"

"I suppose he's told you the same fairy tale he's planted in Potter's mind?" spat Snape. "Something about a rat, and Pettigrew being alive —"

"That, indeed, is Black's story," said Dumbledore, surveying

Snape closely through his half-moon spectacles.

“And does my evidence count for nothing?” snarled Snape. “Peter Pettigrew was not in the Shrieking Shack, nor did I see any sign of him on the grounds.”

“That was because you were knocked out, Professor!” said Hermione earnestly. “You didn’t arrive in time to hear —”

“Miss Granger, HOLD YOUR TONGUE!”

“Now, Snape,” said Fudge, startled, “the young lady is disturbed in her mind, we must make allowances —”

“I would like to speak to Harry and Hermione alone,” said Dumbledore abruptly. “Cornelius, Severus, Poppy — please leave us.”

“Headmaster!” sputtered Madam Pomfrey. “They need treatment, they need rest —”

“This cannot wait,” said Dumbledore. “I must insist.”

Madam Pomfrey pursed her lips and strode away into her office at the end of the ward, slamming the door behind her. Fudge consulted the large gold pocket watch dangling from his waistcoat.

“The dementors should have arrived by now,” he said. “I’ll go and meet them, Dumbledore, I’ll see you upstairs.”

He crossed to the door and held it open for Snape, but Snape hadn’t moved.

“You surely don’t believe a word of Black’s story?” Snape whispered, his eyes fixed on Dumbledore’s face.

“I wish to speak to Harry and Hermione alone,” Dumbledore repeated.

Snape took a step toward Dumbledore.

“Sirius Black showed he was capable of murder at the age of sixteen,” he breathed. “You haven’t forgotten that, Headmaster? You haven’t forgotten that he once tried to kill *me*?”

“My memory is as good as it ever was, Severus,” said Dumbledore quietly.

Snape turned on his heel and marched through the door Fudge was still holding. It closed behind them, and Dumbledore turned to Harry and Hermione. They both burst into speech at the same time.

“Professor, Black’s telling the truth — we *saw* Pettigrew —”

“— he escaped when Professor Lupin turned into a werewolf —”

“— he’s a rat —”

“— Pettigrew’s front paw, I mean, finger, he cut it off —”

“— Pettigrew attacked Ron, it wasn’t Sirius —”

But Dumbledore held up his hand to stem the flood of explanations.

“It is your turn to listen, and I beg you will not interrupt me, because there is very little time,” he said quietly. “There is not a shred of proof to support Black’s story, except your word — and the word of two thirteen-year-old wizards will not convince anybody. A street full of eyewitnesses swore they saw Sirius murder Pettigrew. I myself gave evidence to the Ministry that Sirius had been the Potters’ Secret-Keeper.”

“Professor Lupin can tell you —” Harry said, unable to stop himself.

“Professor Lupin is currently deep in the forest, unable to tell anyone anything. By the time he is human again, it will be too late. Sirius will be worse than dead. I might add that werewolves are so

mistrusted by most of our kind that his support will count for very little — and the fact that he and Sirius are old friends —”

“But —”

“*Listen to me, Harry.* It is too late, you understand me? You must see that Professor Snape’s version of events is far more convincing than yours.”

“He hates Sirius,” Hermione said desperately. “All because of some stupid trick Sirius played on him —”

“Sirius has not acted like an innocent man. The attack on the Fat Lady — entering Gryffindor Tower with a knife — without Pettigrew, alive or dead, we have no chance of overturning Sirius’s sentence.”

“*But you believe us.*”

“Yes, I do,” said Dumbledore quietly. “But I have no power to make other men see the truth, or to overrule the Minister of Magic. . . .”

Harry stared up into the grave face and felt as though the ground beneath him were falling sharply away. He had grown used to the idea that Dumbledore could solve anything. He had expected Dumbledore to pull some amazing solution out of the air. But no . . . their last hope was gone.

“What we need,” said Dumbledore slowly, and his light blue eyes moved from Harry to Hermione, “is more *time*.”

“But —” Hermione began. And then her eyes became very round. “OH!”

“Now, pay attention,” said Dumbledore, speaking very low, and very clearly. “Sirius is locked in Professor Flitwick’s office on the

seventh floor. Thirteenth window from the right of the West Tower. If all goes well, you will be able to save more than one innocent life tonight. But remember this, both of you: *You must not be seen.* Miss Granger, you know the law — you know what is at stake. . . . *You — must — not — be — seen.*”

Harry didn't have a clue what was going on. Dumbledore had turned on his heel and looked back as he reached the door.

“I am going to lock you in. It is —” he consulted his watch, “five minutes to midnight. Miss Granger, three turns should do it. Good luck.”

“Good luck?” Harry repeated as the door closed behind Dumbledore. “Three turns? What's he talking about? What are we supposed to do?”

But Hermione was fumbling with the neck of her robes, pulling from beneath them a very long, very fine gold chain.

“Harry, come here,” she said urgently. “*Quick!*”

Harry moved toward her, completely bewildered. She was holding the chain out. He saw a tiny, sparkling hourglass hanging from it.

“Here —”

She had thrown the chain around his neck too.

“Ready?” she said breathlessly.

“What are we doing?” Harry said, completely lost.

Hermione turned the hourglass over three times.

The dark ward dissolved. Harry had the sensation that he was flying very fast, backward. A blur of colors and shapes rushed past him, his ears were pounding, he tried to yell but couldn't hear his own voice —

And then he felt solid ground beneath his feet, and everything came into focus again —

He was standing next to Hermione in the deserted entrance hall and a stream of golden sunlight was falling across the paved floor from the open front doors. He looked wildly around at Hermione, the chain of the hourglass cutting into his neck.

“Hermione, what — ?”

“In here!” Hermione seized Harry’s arm and dragged him across the hall to the door of a broom closet; she opened it, pushed him inside among the buckets and mops, then slammed the door behind them.

“What — how — Hermione, what happened?”

“We’ve gone back in time,” Hermione whispered, lifting the chain off Harry’s neck in the darkness. “Three hours back . . .”

Harry found his own leg and gave it a very hard pinch. It hurt a lot, which seemed to rule out the possibility that he was having a very bizarre dream.

“But —”

“Shh! Listen! Someone’s coming! I think — I think it might be us!”

Hermione had her ear pressed against the cupboard door.

“Footsteps across the hall . . . yes, I think it’s us going down to Hagrid’s!”

“Are you telling me,” Harry whispered, “that we’re here in this cupboard and we’re out there too?”

“Yes,” said Hermione, her ear still glued to the cupboard door. “I’m sure it’s us. It doesn’t sound like more than three people . . . and we’re walking slowly because we’re under the Invisibility Cloak

She broke off, still listening intently.

“We’ve gone down the front steps. . . .”

Hermione sat down on an upturned bucket, looking desperately anxious, but Harry wanted a few questions answered.

“Where did you *get* that hourglass thing?”

“It’s called a Time-Turner,” Hermione whispered, “and I got it from Professor McGonagall on our first day back. I’ve been using it all year to get to all my lessons. Professor McGonagall made me swear I wouldn’t tell anyone. She had to write all sorts of letters to the Ministry of Magic so I could have one. She had to tell them that I was a model student, and that I’d never, ever use it for anything except my studies. . . . I’ve been turning it back so I could do hours over again, that’s how I’ve been doing several lessons at once, see? But . . .

“Harry, *I don’t understand what Dumbledore wants us to do*. Why did he tell us to go back three hours? How’s that going to help Sirius?”

Harry stared at her shadowy face.

“There must be something that happened around now he wants us to change,” he said slowly. “What happened? We were walking down to Hagrid’s three hours ago. . . .”

“This *is* three hours ago, and we *are* walking down to Hagrid’s,” said Hermione. “We just heard ourselves leaving. . . .”

Harry frowned; he felt as though he were screwing up his whole brain in concentration.

“Dumbledore just said — just said we could save more than one

innocent life. . . .” And then it hit him. “Hermione, we’re going to save Buckbeak!”

“But — how will that help Sirius?”

“Dumbledore said — he just told us where the window is — the window of Flitwick’s office! Where they’ve got Sirius locked up! We’ve got to fly Buckbeak up to the window and rescue Sirius! Sirius can escape on Buckbeak — they can escape together!”

From what Harry could see of Hermione’s face, she looked terrified.

“If we manage that without being seen, it’ll be a miracle!”

“Well, we’ve got to try, haven’t we?” said Harry. He stood up and pressed his ear against the door.

“Doesn’t sound like anyone’s there. . . . Come on, let’s go. . . .”

Harry pushed open the closet door. The entrance hall was deserted. As quietly and quickly as they could, they darted out of the closet and down the stone steps. The shadows were already lengthening, the tops of the trees in the Forbidden Forest gilded once more with gold.

“If anyone’s looking out of the window —” Hermione squeaked, looking up at the castle behind them.

“We’ll run for it,” said Harry determinedly. “Straight into the forest, all right? We’ll have to hide behind a tree or something and keep a lookout —”

“Okay, but we’ll go around by the greenhouses!” said Hermione breathlessly. “We need to keep out of sight of Hagrid’s front door, or we’ll see us! We must be nearly at Hagrid’s by now!”

Still working out what she meant, Harry set off at a sprint,

Hermione behind him. They tore across the vegetable gardens to the greenhouses, paused for a moment behind them, then set off again, fast as they could, skirting around the Whomping Willow, tearing toward the shelter of the forest. . . .

Safe in the shadows of the trees, Harry turned around; seconds later, Hermione arrived beside him, panting.

“Right,” she gasped. “We need to sneak over to Hagrid’s. . . . Keep out of sight, Harry. . . .”

They made their way silently through the trees, keeping to the very edge of the forest. Then, as they glimpsed the front of Hagrid’s house, they heard a knock upon his door. They moved quickly behind a wide oak trunk and peered out from either side. Hagrid had appeared in his doorway, shaking and white, looking around to see who had knocked. And Harry heard his own voice.

“It’s us. We’re wearing the Invisibility Cloak. Let us in and we can take it off.”

“Yeh shouldn’ve come!” Hagrid whispered. He stood back, then shut the door quickly.

“This is the weirdest thing we’ve ever done,” Harry said fervently.

“Let’s move along a bit,” Hermione whispered. “We need to get nearer to Buckbeak!”

They crept through the trees until they saw the nervous hippogriff, tethered to the fence around Hagrid’s pumpkin patch.

“Now?” Harry whispered.

“No!” said Hermione. “If we steal him now, those Committee people will think Hagrid set him free! We’ve got to wait until they’ve seen he’s tied outside!”

“That’s going to give us about sixty seconds,” said Harry. This was starting to seem impossible.

At that moment, there was a crash of breaking china from inside Hagrid’s cabin.

“That’s Hagrid breaking the milk jug,” Hermione whispered. “I’m going to find Scabbers in a moment —”

Sure enough, a few minutes later, they heard Hermione’s shriek of surprise.

“Hermione,” said Harry suddenly, “what if we — we just run in there and grab Pettigrew —”

“No!” said Hermione in a terrified whisper. “Don’t you understand? We’re breaking one of the most important Wizarding laws! Nobody’s supposed to change time, nobody! You heard Dumbledore, if we’re seen —”

“We’d only be seen by ourselves and Hagrid!”

“Harry, what do you think you’d do if you saw yourself bursting into Hagrid’s house?” said Hermione.

“I’d — I’d think I’d gone mad,” said Harry, “or I’d think there was some Dark Magic going on —”

“*Exactly!* You wouldn’t understand, you might even attack yourself! Don’t you see? Professor McGonagall told me what awful things have happened when wizards have meddled with time. Loads of them ended up killing their past or future selves by mistake!”

“Okay!” said Harry. “It was just an idea, I just thought —”

But Hermione nudged him and pointed toward the castle. Harry moved his head a few inches to get a clear view of the distant front

doors. Dumbledore, Fudge, the old Committee member, and Macnair the executioner were coming down the steps.

“We’re about to come out!” Hermione breathed.

And sure enough, moments later, Hagrid’s back door opened, and Harry saw himself, Ron, and Hermione walking out of it with Hagrid. It was, without a doubt, the strangest sensation of his life, standing behind the tree, and watching himself in the pumpkin patch.

“It’s okay, Beaky, it’s okay . . . ,” Hagrid said to Buckbeak. Then he turned to Harry, Ron, and Hermione. “Go on. Get goin’.”

“Hagrid, we can’t —”

“We’ll tell them what really happened —”

“They can’t kill him —”

“Go! It’s bad enough without you lot in trouble an’ all!”

Harry watched the Hermione in the pumpkin patch throw the Invisibility Cloak over him and Ron.

“Go quick. Don’t listen. . . .”

There was a knock on Hagrid’s front door. The execution party had arrived. Hagrid turned around and headed back into his cabin, leaving the back door ajar. Harry watched the grass flatten in patches all around the cabin and heard three pairs of feet retreating. He, Ron, and Hermione had gone . . . but the Harry and Hermione hidden in the trees could now hear what was happening inside the cabin through the back door.

“Where is the beast?” came the cold voice of Macnair.

“Out — outside,” Hagrid croaked.

Harry pulled his head out of sight as Macnair’s face appeared at Hagrid’s window, staring out at Buckbeak. Then they heard Fudge.

“We — er — have to read you the official notice of execution, Hagrid. I’ll make it quick. And then you and Macnair need to sign it. Macnair, you’re supposed to listen too, that’s procedure —”

Macnair’s face vanished from the window. It was now or never.

“Wait here,” Harry whispered to Hermione. “I’ll do it.”

As Fudge’s voice started again, Harry darted out from behind his tree, vaulted the fence into the pumpkin patch, and approached Buckbeak.

“It is the decision of the Committee for the Disposal of Dangerous Creatures that the hippogriff Buckbeak, hereafter called the condemned, shall be executed on the sixth of June at sundown —”

Careful not to blink, Harry stared up into Buckbeak’s fierce orange eyes once more and bowed. Buckbeak sank to his scaly knees and then stood up again. Harry began to fumble with the knot of rope tying Buckbeak to the fence.

“... sentenced to execution by beheading, to be carried out by the Committee’s appointed executioner, Walden Macnair...”

“Come on, Buckbeak,” Harry murmured, “come on, we’re going to help you. Quietly . . . quietly . . .”

“... as witnessed below. Hagrid, you sign here. . . .”

Harry threw all his weight onto the rope, but Buckbeak had dug in his front feet.

“Well, let’s get this over with,” said the reedy voice of the Committee member from inside Hagrid’s cabin. “Hagrid, perhaps it will be better if you stay inside —”

“No, I — I wan’ ter be with him. . . . I don’ wan’ him ter be alone

Footsteps echoed from within the cabin.

"Buckbeak, move!" Harry hissed.

Harry tugged harder on the rope around Buckbeak's neck. The hippogriff began to walk, rustling its wings irritably. They were still ten feet away from the forest, in plain view of Hagrid's back door.

"One moment, please, Macnair," came Dumbledore's voice. "You need to sign too." The footsteps stopped. Harry heaved on the rope. Buckbeak snapped his beak and walked a little faster.

Hermione's white face was sticking out from behind a tree.

"Harry, hurry!" she mouthed.

Harry could still hear Dumbledore's voice talking from within the cabin. He gave the rope another wrench. Buckbeak broke into a grudging trot. They had reached the trees . . .

"Quick! Quick!" Hermione moaned, darting out from behind her tree, seizing the rope too and adding her weight to make Buckbeak move faster. Harry looked over his shoulder; they were now blocked from sight; they couldn't see Hagrid's garden at all.

"Stop!" he whispered to Hermione. "They might hear us —"

Hagrid's back door had opened with a bang. Harry, Hermione, and Buckbeak stood quite still; even the hippogriff seemed to be listening intently.

Silence . . . then —

"Where is it?" said the reedy voice of the Committee member.
"Where is the beast?"

"It was tied here!" said the executioner furiously. "I saw it! Just here!"

“How extraordinary,” said Dumbledore. There was a note of amusement in his voice.

“Beaky!” said Hagrid huskily.

There was a swishing noise, and the thud of an axe. The executioner seemed to have swung it into the fence in anger. And then came the howling, and this time they could hear Hagrid’s words through his sobs.

“Gone! Gone! Bless his little beak, he’s *gone*! Musta pulled himself free! Beaky, yeh clever boy!”

Buckbeak started to strain against the rope, trying to get back to Hagrid. Harry and Hermione tightened their grip and dug their heels into the forest floor to stop him.

“Someone untied him!” the executioner was snarling. “We should search the grounds, the forest —”

“Macnair, if Buckbeak has indeed been stolen, do you really think the thief will have led him away on foot?” said Dumbledore, still sounding amused. “Search the skies, if you will. . . . Hagrid, I could do with a cup of tea. Or a large brandy.”

“O’ — o’ course, Professor,” said Hagrid, who sounded weak with happiness. “Come in, come in. . . .”

Harry and Hermione listened closely. They heard footsteps, the soft cursing of the executioner, the snap of the door, and then silence once more.

“Now what?” whispered Harry, looking around.

“We’ll have to hide in here,” said Hermione, who looked very shaken. “We need to wait until they’ve gone back to the castle. Then we wait until it’s safe to fly Buckbeak up to Sirius’s window. He

won't be there for another couple of hours. . . . Oh, this is going to be difficult. . . .”

She looked nervously over her shoulder into the depths of the forest. The sun was setting now.

“We’re going to have to move,” said Harry, thinking hard. “We’ve got to be able to see the Whomping Willow, or we won’t know what’s going on.”

“Okay,” said Hermione, getting a firmer grip on Buckbeak’s rope. “But we’ve got to keep out of sight, Harry, remember. . . .”

They moved around the edge of the forest, darkness falling thickly around them, until they were hidden behind a clump of trees through which they could make out the Willow.

“There’s Ron!” said Harry suddenly.

A dark figure was sprinting across the lawn and its shout echoed through the still night air.

“Get away from him — get away — Scabbers, come *here* —”

And then they saw two more figures materialize out of nowhere. Harry watched himself and Hermione chasing after Ron. Then he saw Ron dive.

“*Gotcha!* Get off, you stinking cat —”

“There’s Sirius!” said Harry. The great shape of the dog had bounded out from the roots of the Willow. They saw him bowl Harry over, then seize Ron. . . .

“Looks even worse from here, doesn’t it?” said Harry, watching the dog pulling Ron into the roots. “Ouch — look, I just got walloped by the tree — and so did you — this is *weird* —”

The Whomping Willow was creaking and lashing out with its

lower branches; they could see themselves darting here and there, trying to reach the trunk. And then the tree froze.

“That was Crookshanks pressing the knot,” said Hermione.

“And there we go . . .” Harry muttered. “We’re in.”

The moment they disappeared, the tree began to move again. Seconds later, they heard footsteps quite close by. Dumbledore, Macnair, Fudge, and the old Committee member were making their way up to the castle.

“Right after we’d gone down into the passage!” said Hermione. “If *only* Dumbledore had come with us . . .”

“Macnair and Fudge would’ve come too,” said Harry bitterly. “I bet you anything Fudge would’ve told Macnair to murder Sirius on the spot. . . .”

They watched the four men climb the castle steps and disappear from view. For a few minutes the scene was deserted. Then —

“Here comes Lupin!” said Harry as they saw another figure sprinting down the stone steps and haring toward the Willow. Harry looked up at the sky. Clouds were obscuring the moon completely.

They watched Lupin seize a broken branch from the ground and prod the knot on the trunk. The tree stopped fighting, and Lupin, too, disappeared into the gap in its roots.

“If he’d only grabbed the Cloak,” said Harry. “It’s just lying there. . . .”

He turned to Hermione.

“If I just dashed out now and grabbed it, Snape’d never be able to get it and —”

“Harry, *we mustn’t be seen!*”

“How can you stand this?” he asked Hermione fiercely. “Just standing here and watching it happen?” He hesitated. “I’m going to grab the Cloak!”

“Harry, *no!*”

Hermione seized the back of Harry’s robes not a moment too soon. Just then, they heard a burst of song. It was Hagrid, making his way up to the castle, singing at the top of his voice, and weaving slightly as he walked. A large bottle was swinging from his hands.

“*See?*” Hermione whispered. “*See what would have happened?* We’ve got to keep out of sight! *No, Buckbeak!*”

The hippogriff was making frantic attempts to get to Hagrid again; Harry seized his rope too, straining to hold Buckbeak back. They watched Hagrid meander tipsily up to the castle. He was gone. Buckbeak stopped fighting to get away. His head drooped sadly.

Barely two minutes later, the castle doors flew open yet again, and Snape came charging out of them, running toward the Willow.

Harry’s fists clenched as they watched Snape skid to a halt next to the tree, looking around. He grabbed the Cloak and held it up.

“Get your filthy hands off it,” Harry snarled under his breath.

“Shh!”

Snape seized the branch Lupin had used to freeze the tree, prodded the knot, and vanished from view as he put on the Cloak.

“So that’s it,” said Hermione quietly. “We’re all down there and now we’ve just got to wait until we come back up again.”

She took the end of Buckbeak’s rope and tied it securely around the nearest tree, then sat down on the dry ground, arms around her knees.

“Harry, there’s something I don’t understand. . . . Why didn’t the dementors get Sirius? I remember them coming, and then I think I passed out . . . there were so many of them. . . .”

Harry sat down too. He explained what he’d seen; how, as the nearest dementor had lowered its mouth to Harry’s, a large silver something had come galloping across the lake and forced the dementors to retreat.

Hermione’s mouth was slightly open by the time Harry had finished.

“But what was it?”

“There’s only one thing it could have been, to make the dementors go,” said Harry. “A real Patronus. A powerful one.”

“But who conjured it?”

Harry didn’t say anything. He was thinking back to the person he’d seen on the other bank of the lake. He knew who he thought it had been . . . but how *could* it have been?

“Didn’t you see what they looked like?” said Hermione eagerly. “Was it one of the teachers?”

“No,” said Harry. “He wasn’t a teacher.”

“But it must have been a really powerful wizard, to drive all those dementors away. . . . If the Patronus was shining so brightly, didn’t it light him up? Couldn’t you see — ?”

“Yeah, I saw him,” said Harry slowly. “But . . . maybe I imagined it. . . . I wasn’t thinking straight. . . . I passed out right afterward. . . .”

“*Who did you think it was?*”

“I think —” Harry swallowed, knowing how strange this was going to sound. “I think it was my dad.”

Harry glanced up at Hermione and saw that her mouth was fully open now. She was gazing at him with a mixture of alarm and pity.

“Harry, your dad’s — well — *dead*,” she said quietly.

“I know that,” said Harry quickly.

“You think you saw his ghost?”

“I don’t know . . . no . . . he looked solid . . .”

“But then —”

“Maybe I was seeing things,” said Harry. “But . . . from what I could see . . . it looked like him. . . . I’ve got photos of him . . .”

Hermione was still looking at him as though worried about his sanity.

“I know it sounds crazy,” said Harry flatly. He turned to look at Buckbeak, who was digging his beak into the ground, apparently searching for worms. But he wasn’t really watching Buckbeak.

He was thinking about his father and about his three oldest friends . . . Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, and Prongs. . . . Had all four of them been out on the grounds tonight? Wormtail had reappeared this evening when everyone had thought he was dead. . . . Was it so impossible his father had done the same? Had he been seeing things across the lake? The figure had been too far away to see distinctly . . . yet he had felt sure, for a moment, before he’d lost consciousness. . . .

The leaves overhead rustled faintly in the breeze. The moon drifted in and out of sight behind the shifting clouds. Hermione sat with her face turned toward the Willow, waiting.

And then, at last, after over an hour . . .

“Here we come!” Hermione whispered.

She and Harry got to their feet. Buckbeak raised his head. They saw Lupin, Ron, and Pettigrew clambering awkwardly out of the hole in the roots, followed by the unconscious Snape drifting weirdly upward. Next came Harry, Hermione, and Black. They all began to walk toward the castle.

Harry's heart was starting to beat very fast. He glanced up at the sky. Any moment now, that cloud was going to move aside and show the moon. . . .

"Harry," Hermione muttered as though she knew exactly what he was thinking, "we've got to stay put. We mustn't be seen. There's nothing we can do. . . ."

"So we're just going to let Pettigrew escape all over again. . . ." said Harry quietly.

"How do you expect to find a rat in the dark?" snapped Hermione. "There's nothing we can do! We came back to help Sirius. We're not supposed to be doing anything else!"

"All right!"

The moon slid out from behind its cloud. They saw the tiny figures across the grounds stop. Then they saw movement —

"There goes Lupin," Hermione whispered. "He's transforming —"

"Hermione!" said Harry suddenly. "We've got to move!"

"We mustn't, I keep telling you —"

"Not to interfere! Lupin's going to run into the forest, right at us!"

Hermione gasped.

"Quick!" she moaned, dashing to untie Buckbeak. "Quick! Where are we going to go? Where are we going to hide? The dementors will be coming any moment —"

“Back to Hagrid’s!” Harry said. “It’s empty now — come on!”

They ran as fast as they could, Buckbeak cantering along behind them. They could hear the werewolf howling behind them.

The cabin was in sight; Harry skidded to the door, wrenched it open, and Hermione and Buckbeak flashed past him; Harry threw himself in after them and bolted the door. Fang the boarhound barked loudly.

“Shh, Fang, it’s us!” said Hermione, hurrying over and scratching his ears to quieten him. “That was really close!” she said to Harry.

“Yeah . . .”

Harry was looking out of the window. It was much harder to see what was going on from here. Buckbeak seemed very happy to find himself back inside Hagrid’s house. He lay down in front of the fire, folded his wings contentedly, and seemed ready for a good nap.

“I think I’d better go outside again, you know,” said Harry slowly. “I can’t see what’s going on — we won’t know when it’s time —”

Hermione looked up. Her expression was suspicious.

“I’m not going to try and interfere,” said Harry quickly. “But if we don’t see what’s going on, how’re we going to know when it’s time to rescue Sirius?”

“Well . . . okay, then . . . I’ll wait here with Buckbeak . . . but Harry, be careful — there’s a werewolf out there — and the dementors —”

Harry stepped outside again and edged around the cabin. He could hear yelping in the distance. That meant the dementors were closing in on Sirius. . . . He and Hermione would be running to him any moment. . . .

Harry stared out toward the lake, his heart doing a kind of drumroll in his chest. . . . Whoever had sent that Patronus would be appearing at any moment. . . .

For a fraction of a second he stood, irresolute, in front of Hagrid's door. *You must not be seen.* But he didn't want to be seen. He wanted to do the seeing. . . . He had to know. . . .

And there were the dementors. They were emerging out of the darkness from every direction, gliding around the edges of the lake. . . . They were moving away from where Harry stood, to the opposite bank. . . . He wouldn't have to get near them. . . .

Harry began to run. He had no thought in his head except his father. . . . If it was him. . . . if it really was him. . . . he had to know, had to find out. . . .

The lake was coming nearer and nearer, but there was no sign of anybody. On the opposite bank, he could see tiny glimmers of silver — his own attempts at a Patronus —

There was a bush at the very edge of the water. Harry threw himself behind it, peering desperately through the leaves. On the opposite bank, the glimmers of silver were suddenly extinguished. A terrified excitement shot through him — any moment now —

"Come on!" he muttered, staring about. "Where are you? Dad, come on —"

But no one came. Harry raised his head to look at the circle of dementors across the lake. One of them was lowering its hood. It was time for the rescuer to appear — but no one was coming to help this time —

And then it hit him — he understood. He hadn't seen his father —

he had seen *himself*—

Harry flung himself out from behind the bush and pulled out his wand.

"EXPECTO PATRONUM!" he yelled.

And out of the end of his wand burst, not a shapeless cloud of mist, but a blinding, dazzling, silver animal. He screwed up his eyes, trying to see what it was. It looked like a horse. It was galloping silently away from him, across the black surface of the lake. He saw it lower its head and charge at the swarming dementors. . . . Now it was galloping around and around the black shapes on the ground, and the dementors were falling back, scattering, retreating into the darkness. . . . They were gone.

The Patronus turned. It was cantering back toward Harry across the still surface of the water. It wasn't a horse. It wasn't a unicorn, either. It was a stag. It was shining brightly as the moon above. . . . It was coming back to him. . . .

It stopped on the bank. Its hooves made no mark on the soft ground as it stared at Harry with its large, silver eyes. Slowly, it bowed its antlered head. And Harry realized . . .

"Prongs," he whispered.

But as his trembling fingertips stretched toward the creature, it vanished.

Harry stood there, hand still outstretched. Then, with a great leap of his heart, he heard hooves behind him — he whirled around and saw Hermione dashing toward him, dragging Buckbeak behind her.

"What did you do?" she said fiercely. *"You said you were only going to keep a lookout!"*

“I just saved all our lives . . . ,” said Harry. “Get behind here — behind this bush — I’ll explain.”

Hermione listened to what had just happened with her mouth open yet again.

“Did anyone see you?”

“Yes, haven’t you been listening? *I* saw me but I thought I was my dad! It’s okay!”

“Harry, I can’t believe it. . . . You conjured up a Patronus that drove away all those dementors! That’s very, *very* advanced magic. . . .”

“I knew I could do it this time,” said Harry, “because I’d already done it. . . . Does that make sense?”

“I don’t know — Harry, look at Snape!”

Together they peered around the bush at the other bank. Snape had regained consciousness. He was conjuring stretchers and lifting the limp forms of Harry, Hermione, and Black onto them. A fourth stretcher, no doubt bearing Ron, was already floating at his side. Then, wand held out in front of him, he moved them away toward the castle.

“Right, it’s nearly time,” said Hermione tensely, looking at her watch. “We’ve got about forty-five minutes until Dumbledore locks the door to the hospital wing. We’ve got to rescue Sirius and get back into the ward before anybody realizes we’re missing. . . .”

They waited, watching the moving clouds reflected in the lake, while the bush next to them whispered in the breeze. Buckbeak, bored, was ferreting for worms again.

“D’you reckon he’s up there yet?” said Harry, checking his watch.

He looked up at the castle and began counting the windows to the right of the West Tower.

“Look!” Hermione whispered. “Who’s that? Someone’s coming back out of the castle!”

Harry stared through the darkness. The man was hurrying across the grounds, toward one of the entrances. Something shiny glinted in his belt.

“Macnair!” said Harry. “The executioner! He’s gone to get the dementors! This is it, Hermione —”

Hermione put her hands on Buckbeak’s back and Harry gave her a leg up. Then he placed his foot on one of the lower branches of the bush and climbed up in front of her. He pulled Buckbeak’s rope back over his neck and tied it to the other side of his collar like reins.

“Ready?” he whispered to Hermione. “You’d better hold on to me —”

He nudged Buckbeak’s sides with his heels.

Buckbeak soared straight into the dark air. Harry gripped his flanks with his knees, feeling the great wings rising powerfully beneath them. Hermione was holding Harry very tight around the waist; he could hear her muttering, “Oh, no — I don’t like this — oh, I *really* don’t like this —”

Harry urged Buckbeak forward. They were gliding quietly toward the upper floors of the castle. . . . Harry pulled hard on the left-hand side of the rope, and Buckbeak turned. Harry was trying to count the windows flashing past —

“Whoa!” he said, pulling backward as hard as he could.

Buckbeak slowed down and they found themselves at a stop.

unless you counted the fact that they kept rising up and down several feet as the hippogriff beat his wings to remain airborne.

“He’s there!” Harry said, spotting Sirius as they rose up beside the window. He reached out, and as Buckbeak’s wings fell, was able to tap sharply on the glass.

Black looked up. Harry saw his jaw drop. He leapt from his chair, hurried to the window, and tried to open it, but it was locked.

“Stand back!” Hermione called to him, and she took out her wand, still gripping the back of Harry’s robes with her left hand.

“Alohomora!”

The window sprang open.

“How — how — ?” said Black weakly, staring at the hippogriff.

“Get on — there’s not much time,” said Harry, gripping Buckbeak firmly on either side of his sleek neck to hold him steady. “You’ve got to get out of here — the dementors are coming — Macnair’s gone to get them.”

Black placed a hand on either side of the window frame and heaved his head and shoulders out of it. It was very lucky he was so thin. In seconds, he had managed to fling one leg over Buckbeak’s back and pull himself onto the hippogriff behind Hermione.

“Okay, Buckbeak, up!” said Harry, shaking the rope. “Up to the tower — come on!”

The hippogriff gave one sweep of its mighty wings and they were soaring upward again, high as the top of the West Tower. Buckbeak landed with a clatter on the battlements, and Harry and Hermione slid off him at once.

“Sirius, you’d better go, quick,” Harry panted. “They’ll reach

Flitwick's office any moment, they'll find out you're gone."

Buckbeak pawed the ground, tossing his sharp head.

"What happened to the other boy? Ron?" croaked Sirius.

"He's going to be okay. He's still out of it, but Madam Pomfrey says she'll be able to make him better. Quick — go —"

But Black was still staring down at Harry.

"How can I ever thank —"

"GO!" Harry and Hermione shouted together.

Black wheeled Buckbeak around, facing the open sky.

"We'll see each other again," he said. "You are — truly your father's son, Harry. . . ."

He squeezed Buckbeak's sides with his heels. Harry and Hermione jumped back as the enormous wings rose once more. . . . The hippogriff took off into the air. . . . He and his rider became smaller and smaller as Harry gazed after them. . . . then a cloud drifted across the moon. . . . They were gone.

Hermien se Geheim

“Skokkende besigheid . . . skokkend . . . ’n wonder dat niemand dood is nie . . . het nog nooit van so iets gehoor nie . . . dit was sowaar ’n geluk dat jy daar was, Snerp . . .”

“Dankie, minister.”

“Orde van Merlin, Tweede Klas, sou ek sê. Eerste Klas as ek ’n paar toutjies kan trek.”

“Baie dankie, inderdaad, minister.”

“Lelike sny wat jy daar het . . . Ek veronderstel dis Swardt se werk?”

“Dit was om die waarheid te sê Potter, Weasley en La Grange, minister . . .”

“Nooit!”

“Swardt het hulle betower, ek het dit dadelik gesien. ’n Verwarrings-towerspreuk te oordeel na hul gedrag. Hulle het skynbaar gedink dat daar ’n moontlikheid is dat hy onskuldig is. Hulle was nie verantwoordelik vir hul eie optrede nie. Aan die ander kant het hul bemoeienis dit waarskynlik vir Swardt moontlik gemaak om te ontsnap . . . Hulle het oënskynlik gedink hulle sal Swardt eiehandig kan vang. Hulle het al in die verlede groot kanse gewaag en daarmee weggekom . . . Ek is bevrees dat dit na hul koppe gegaan het . . . natuurlik word Potter heeltemal te veel deur die skoolhoof toegelaat –”

“Ag, nou ja, Snerp . . . Harry Potter, jy weet . . . ons is almal ’n bietjie blind vir sy foutjies.”

“En tog – is dit goed vir hom om so uitgesonder te word? Persoonlik probeer ek om hom net soos al die ander studente te behandel. En enige ander student sal – op die minste – geskors word as hy sy vriende in sulke gevaar gestel het. Dink daaroor, minister: teen alle skoolreëls – na al die voorsorgmaatreëls wat ter wille van sy veiligheid getref is – op verbode terrein, in die nag, in die geselskap van ’n weerwolf en ’n moordenaar – en ek het rede om te glo dat hy ook onwettig na Hogsmeade toe gegaan het –”

“Wel, wel . . . ons sal sien, Snerp, ons sal sien . . . die seun het ongetwyfeld dwaas opgetree . . .”

Harry lê en luister met sy oë styf toegeknyp. Hy voel dronk in die kop.

Dis of die woorde wat hy so pas gehoor het, baie stadig van sy ore na sy brein dryf sodat dit moeilik is om te verstaan. Sy ledemate voel soos lood; sy ooglede is te swaar om op te lig. . . . hy wil net vir altyd op hierdie gemaklike bed lê . . .

“Wat my die meeste verbaas, is die gedrag van die Dementors. . . . Het jy ’n idee wat hulle laat terugval het, Snerp?”

“Nee, minister. Teen die tyd dat ek bygekom het, was hulle op pad terug na hul poste by die ingange. . . .”

“Buitengewoon. En tog was Swardt en Harry en die meisie. . . .”

“Almal bewusteloos toe ek daar kom. Ek het uit die aard van die saak vir Swardt vasgemaak en gemuilband, draagbare opgetower en hulle almal reguit kasteel toe gebring.”

Daar is ’n stilte. Dis of Harry se brein ’n bietjie vinniger begin beweeg, en daarmee saam groei ’n vretende sensasie in sy maag.

Hy maak sy oë oop.

Alles is ietwat uit fokus. Iemand het sy bril afgehaal. Hy lê in die donker siekeboeg. Aan die oorkant van die saal kan hy vir Madame Pomfrey uitmaak waar sy met haar rug na hom oor ’n bed buk. Harry vernou sy oë. Ron se rooi hare is sigbaar onder Madame Pomfrey se arm.

Harry draai sy kop op die kussing. In die bed langs hom lê Hermien. Die maanlig val oor haar bed. Haar oë is oop. Sy lyk verskrik en toe sy sien dat Harry vir haar kyk, druk sy ’n vinger teen haar lippe en beduie na die siekeboeg se deur. Dit is op ’n skrefie oop en hy kan Cornelius Broddelwerk en Snerp wat in die gang staan se stemme daardeur hoor.

Madame Pomfrey kom vinnig deur die donker saal na Harry se bed toe aangestap. Hy draai sy kop om na haar te kyk. Sy dra die grootste stuk sjokolade wat hy nog in sy lewe gesien het. Dit lyk soos ’n rotsblok.

“A, julle is wakker!” sê sy flink. Sy sit die sjokolade op Harry se bedkassie neer en begin om dit met ’n klein hamertjie uitmekaar te kap.

“Hoe gaan dit met Ron?” vra Harry en Hermien tegelyk.

“Hy sal lewe,” sê Madame Pomfrey grimmig. “En wat julle twee betref. . . . julle sal hier bly tot ek met julle tevrede is – Potter, wat dink jy doen jy?”

Harry het reeds regop gekom, hy sit sy bril op sy neus en tel sy towerstaf op.

“Ek moet die skoolhoof gaan sien,” sê hy.

“Potter,” sê Madame Pomfrey paaierend, “alles is reg. Hulle het vir Swardt. Hy’s veilig daar bo toegesluit. Die Dementors sal die Kus nou enige oomblik gee –”

“WAT?”

Harry spring uit die bed, gevolg deur Hermien. Sy uitroep moet egter tot buite in die gang hoorbaar gewees het, want die volgende oomblik kom Cornelius Broddelwerk en Snerp die saal binne.

“Harry, Harry, wat gaan aan?” sê Broddelwerk wat ontsteld lyk. “Jy moet in die bed wees – het hy enige sjokolade gehad?” vra hy bekommerd vir Madame Pomfrey.

“Minister, luister!” sê Harry. “Sirius Swardt is onskuldig! Pieter Pansegrouw het net gemaak of hy dood is! Ons het hom vannag gesien! U kan nie toelaat dat die Dementors daardie ding aan Sirius doen nie, hy’s –”

Broddelwerk skud egter sy kop. Daar is ’n klein glimlaggie op sy gesig.

“Harry, Harry, jy is baie verward, jy is deur ’n verskriklike beproewing, lê plat, toe nou, ons het alles onder beheer . . .”

“JULLE HET NIE!” gil Harry. “JULLE HET DIE VERKEERDE MAN GEVANG!”

“Minister, luister, asseblief,” sê Hermien. Sy het haar na Harry gehaas en staar pleitend na Broddelwerk. “Ek het hom ook gesien. Dit was Ron se rot, hy’s ’n Animagus, Pansegrouw, bedoel ek, en –”

“U sien, minister?” sê Snerp. “Heeltemal verward, albei van hulle Swardt het ’n ordentlike joppie op hulle gedoen . . .”

“ONS IS NIE VERWARD NIE!” bulder Harry.

“Minister! Professor!” sê Madame Pomfrey ergerlik. “Ek moet daarop aandring dat julle die saal verlaat. Potter is my pasiënt en hy mag nie ontstel word nie!”

“Ek is nie ontsteld nie, ek probeer vir hulle vertel wat gebeur het!” sê Harry woedend. “As hulle net wil luister –”

Madame Pomfrey prop egter onverwags ’n yslike blok sjokolade in Harry se mond. Hy stik, en sy gebruik die geleentheid om hom terug op die bed te dwing.

“Asseblief, minister, hierdie kinders het versorging nodig. Gaan asseblief –”

Die deur gaan weer oop. Dit is Dompeldorius. Harry sluk die mond vol sjokolade met moeite af en kom weer orent.

“Professor Dompeldorius, Sirius Swardt –”

“Genadetjie tog!” sê Madame Pomfrey histories. “Is dit ’n siekeboeg of wat? Meneer die skoolhoof, ek moet daarop aandring dat –”

“Ek teken verskoning aan, Poppy, maar ek moet met mnr. Potter en mej. La Grange praat,” sê Dompeldorius bedaard. “Ek het so pas met Sirius Swardt gesels –”

“Ek veronderstel hy het vir u dieselfde feëverhaal vertel wat hy in Potter se brein geplant het?” spoeg Snerp dit uit. “Iets oor ’n rot en Pansegrouw wat nog lewe –”

“Dit is inderdaad Swardt se weergawe,” sê Dompeldorius terwyl hy vir Snerp deur sy halfmaanbril bekyk.

“Betekén my getuienis dan niks nie?” snou Snerp. “Pieter Pansegrouw was nie in die Kermende Krot nie en ek het ook nie ’n teken van hom op die terrein gesien nie.”

“Dit was omdat u bewusteloos was, professor,” sê Hermien ernstig. “U het nie betyds opgedaag om te hoor –”

“Juffrou La Grange, HOU JOU MOND!”

“Toe nou, Snerp,” sê Broddelwerk geskok, “die jonge dame is verward, ons moet toegewings maak –”

“Ek wil graag alleen met Harry en Hermien praat,” sê Dompeldorius kortaf. “Cornelius, Severus, Poppy – laat ons asseblief alleen.”

“Maar meneer die hoof!” stribbel Madame Pomfrey tee, “hulle het behandeling nodig, rus –”

“Ek kan nie wag nie,” sê Dompeldorius. “Ek moet hierop aandring.”

Madame Pomfrey pers haar lippe saam, stap na haar kantoor aan die oorkant van die saal en klap die deur agter haar toe. Broddelwerk kyk na sy groot goue horlosie wat aan ’n ketting aan sy onderbaadjie hang.

“Die Dementors moet teen dié tyd al hier wees,” sê hy. “Ek sal hulle gaan ontvang. Dompeldorius, ek sien jou daar bo.”

Hy stap na die deur en hou dit vir Snerp oop, maar Snerp roer nie.

“U gaan Swardt se weergawe darem seker nie glo nie?” fluister Snerp, sy oë vasgenaël op Dompeldorius se gesig.

“Ek wil graag alleen met Harry en Hermien praat,” herhaal Dompeldorius.

Snerp gee ’n tree na Dompeldorius toe.

“Toe Sirius Swardt sestien was, het hy bewys dat hy tot moord in staat is,” sê hy skor. “U het dit darem seker nie vergeet nie? U het seker ook nie vergeet dat hy vir my probeer vermoor het nie?”

“My geheue is nog net so goed soos tevore, Severus,” sê Dompeldorius bedaad.

Snerp draai op sy hak om en marsjeer na die deur wat Broddelwerk nog steeds oophou. Toe dit agter hom toegaan, draai Dompeldorius na Harry en Hermien. Albei van hulle begin tegelyk praat.

“Professor, Swardt vertel die waarheid – ons het vir Pansegrouw gesien –”

“– hy’t ontsnap toe professor Lupin in ’n weerwolf verander het –”

“– hy’s ’n rot –”

“– Pansegrouw het sy toon, ek bedoel, sy vinger, afgesny –”

“– Pansegrouw het vir Ron aangeval, dit was nie Sirius nie –”

Dompeldorius hou sy hand op om die vloedgolf van verduidelikings te stuit.

“Nou is dit julle beurt om te luister en ek versoek dat julle my nie in die rede val nie, want daar is baie min tyd,” sê hy kalmerend. “Daar is nie ’n enkele bewys om Swardt se verhaal te rugsteun nie, buiten jul woord – en die woord van twee dertienjarige toewenaars sal niemand oortuig nie. ’n Straat vol ooggetuies het gesweer dat hulle gesien het hoe Sirius vir Pansegrouw vermoor. Ek het self voor die Ministerie getuig dat Sirius die Potters se Geheimhouer was.”

“Professor Lupin kan vir u vertel –” begin Harry, wat nie daartoe in staat is om homself te betoel nie.

“Professor Lupin is tans diep in die Woud en nie in ’n posisie om enigiets vir enigiemand te vertel nie. Teen die tyd dat hy weer ’n menslike gedaante aangeneem het, sal dit te laat wees, Sirius sal erger as dood wees. Ek kan net byvoeg dat weerwolwe so erg deur die meeste van ons soort gewantrou word dat sy ondersteuning nie veel sal beteken nie – en die feit dat hy en Sirius ou vriende is –”

“Maar –”

“*Luister vir my, Harry.* Dit is te laat, verstaan jy my? Jy moet tog kan insien dat professor Snerp se weergawe van wat gebeur het baie meer oortuigend as julle s’n is.”

“Hy haat vir Sirius,” sê Hermien desperaat. “Net oor die een of ander simpel streep wat Sirius hom getrek het –”

“Sirius het nie soos ’n onskuldige persoon opgetree nie. Die aanval op die Vet Vrou – om die Griffindortoring met ’n mes binne te gaan – *sonder* Pansegrouw, dood of lewend, het ons nie ’n kans om Sirius se vonnis tersyde te stel nie.”

“*Maar u glo ons.*”

“Ja, ek glo julle,” sê Dompeldorius bedaard. “Ek het egter nie die vermoë om ander mense die waarheid te laat insien nie, of om die Minister vir Towerkuns te veto nie . . .”

Harry kyk op in die ernstige gesig en dit voel asof die grond onder hom skielik padgee. Hy het gewoon geraak aan die idee dat Dompeldorius enigiets kan oplos. Hy het verwag dat Dompeldorius die een of ander wonderlike oplossing uit ’n hoed sal haal. Maar nee . . . hul laaste greintjie hoop is tot niks.

“Wat ons nodig het,” sê Dompeldorius stadig en sy ligblou oë beweeg van Harry na Hermien, “is meer tyd.”

“Maar –” begin Hermien. Dan word haar oë baie rond: “O!”

“*Luister baie mooi,*” sê Dompeldorius en hy praat baie saggies maar ook baie duidelik. “Sirius is in professor Flickerpitt se kantoor op die sewende vloer toegesluit. Die dertiende venster regs van die Westoring. As alles goed gaan, kan julle vannag meer as een onskuldige lewe red. Onthou net dit, albei van julle. *Julle mag nie gesien word nie.* Juffrou La Grange, jy ken die wet – jy weet wat op die spel is. . . *julle – mag – nie – gesien – word – nie.*”

Harry het nie ’n idee wat aan die gang is nie. Dompeldorius het op sy hak gedraai en kyk terug toe hy by die deur kom.

“Ek gaan julle nou opsluit. Dit is –” hy kyk na sy horlosie, “vyf minute voor middernag. Juffrou La Grange, drie draaie behoort genoeg te wees. Sterkte!”

“Sterkte?” herhaal Harry toe die deur agter Dompeldorius toegaan.

"Drie draaie? Waarvan praat hy? Wat moet ons kamma doen?"

Hermien vroetel egter met die hals van haar kleed en trek 'n baie lang, baie fyn goue ketting daaruit.

"Harry, kom hier," sê sy dringend. "Goul!"

Heeltemal verwilderd beweeg Harry na haar toe. Sy hou die ketting uit. Hy sien 'n klein blink uurglas wat daaraan hang.

"Hier –"

Sy gooi die ketting ook oor sy kop.

"Gereed?" vra sy kortasem.

"Wat maak ons?" sê Harry, totaal verward.

Hermien keer die uurglas drie keer om.

Die donker slaapsaal verdwyn. Dit voel vir Harry asof hy baie vinnig agteruit vlieg. 'n Warreling van kleure en vorms storm verby hom; sy ore suis. Hy probeer skreeu, maar kan sy eie stem nie hoor nie –

Dan voel hy soliede grond onder sy voete en alles kom weer stadig in fokus –

Hy staan langs Hermien in die verlate ingangsportaal en 'n stroom goue sonlig val deur die oop voordeur oor die geplaveide vloer. Hy kyk wildweg om na Hermien en die uurglas se ketting maak 'n keep in sy nek.

"Hermien, wat –?"

"Kom hier in!" Hermien gryp Harry se arm en sleep hom oor die portaal na 'n besemkas. Sy maak dit oop, stoot hom tussen die emmers en moppe in, klim agterna en slaan die deur agter hulle toe.

"Wat – hoe – Hermien, wat het gebeur?"

"Ons het terug in die tyd gegaan," fluister Hermien terwyl sy die ketting in die donkerte van Harry se nek afhaal. "Drie uur agteruit . . ."

Harry gee sy been 'n baie harde knyp. Dit is goed seer, wat dit onmoontlik maak dat dit 'n baie eienaardige droom kan wees.

"Maar –"

"Sj! Luister! Daar kom iemand! Ek dink – ek dink dis dalk ons!"

Hermien hou haar oor teen die kas se deur.

"Voetstappe in die portaal . . . ja, dis ons op pad na Hagrid toe!"

"Wil jy vir my sê," fluister Harry, "ons is hier in hierdie kas, terwyl ons ook daar buite is?"

"Ja," sê Hermien, haar oor nog steeds teen die kasdeur. "Ek is seker dis ons . . . Dit klink nie na meer as drie mense nie . . . en ons loop baie stadig omdat ons onder die onsigbaarheidsmantel is –"

Sy bly stil, maar luister nog steeds gespanne.

"Daar gaan ons met die trappe af . . ."

Hermien gaan sit op 'n omgekeerde emmer; Harry lyk bitter bekommerd, maar hy moet eers 'n paar dinge uitvind.

"Waar het jy daardie uurglasding gekry?"

"Dis 'n Tyddraaier," fluister Hermien, "en professor McGonagall het

dit op die eerste dag na ons teruggekom het, vir my gegee. Ek gebruik dit nog die hele jaar om by al my lesse te kom. Professor McGonagall het my laat sweer dat ek vir niemand sal sê nie. Sy moes allerhande briewe na die Ministerie vir Towerkuns stuur sodat ek een kon kry. Sy't vir hulle gesê dat ek 'n modelstudent is en dat ek dit nooit ooit vir iets anders as my studies sal gebruik nie. . . . Ek het dit teruggedraai sodat ek die ure kan oordoen, dis hoe ek tegelykertyd by al my lesse kon wees, sien? Maar . . .

"Harry, ek verstaan nie wat Dompeldorius wil hê ons moet doen nie. Hoe kom het hy gesê ons moet drie uur teruggaan? Hoe gaan dit vir Sirius help?"

Harry staar na haar gesig wat in skaduwees gehul is

"Tets moet om en by hierdie tyd gebeur het wat hy wil hê ons moet verander," sê hy stadig. "Wat het alles gebeur? Drie uur gelede het ons na Hagrid toe geloop . . ."

"Dit is nou drie uur gelede en ons loop nou na Hagrid toe," sê Hermien. "Ons het onself nou net hoor loop . . ."

Harry frons. Dit voel asof sy hele brein van konsentrasie inmekaartrek.

"Dompeldorius het gesê – het gesê dat ons meer as een onskuldige lewe kan red . . ." Dan tref dit hom. "Hermien, ons gaan vir Bokbok red!"

"Maar – hoe gaan dit vir Sirius help?"

"Dompeldorius het gesê – het nou net vir ons gesê waar die venster is – Flickerpitt se kantoor se venster! Dis waar Sirius opgesluit is! Ons moet met Bokbok soontoe vlieg en vir Sirius red! Sirius kan dan op Bokbok ontsnap – hulle kan saam ontsnap!"

Volgens wat Harry op Hermien se gesig kan sien, lyk sy heeltemal verskrik.

"As ons dit regkry sonder dat iemand ons sien, sal dit 'n wonderwerk wees."

"Wel, ons moet probeer, nie waar nie?" sê Harry. Hy staan op en druk sy oor teen die deur.

"Dit klink of daar niemand daar buite is nie . . . kom ons gaan."

Harry stoot die kasdeur oop. Die ingangsportaal is verlate. Hulle klouter so stil en so vinnig as wat hulle kan uit die kas en draf met die kliptrappe af ondertoe. Die skaduwees word reeds langer en die toppe van die bome in die Verbode Woud is weer eens oortrek met goud.

"As iemand darem nou deur een van die vensters moet kyk –" kerm Hermien terwyl sy na die kasteel loer.

"Dan hol ons dat dit bars," sê Harry vasberade, "reguit Woud toe, oukei? Ons kan agter 'n boom of iets wegkruip en van daar af dophou –"

"Oukei, maar ons gaan verby die kweekhuise!" sê Hermien uitasem. "Ons moet sorg dat ons nie van Hagrid se voordeur af gesien kan word nie, anders sal ons onself sien! Ons moet teen dié tyd al amper by Hagrid se hut wees!"

Harry is nog besig om uit te werk wat sy bedoel, toe hardloop hy al vir al wat hy werd is met Hermien op sy hakke. Hulle storm deur die groentetuine na die kweekhuise, talm vir 'n paar oomblikke daar en laat vat dan weer so vinnig as wat hulle kan om die Woelige Wilg tot by die skuiling wat die Woud bied . . .

Veilig in die skaduwee van die bome draai Harry om; sekondes later daag Hermien ook hygend op.

"Reg," sê sy blaas-blaas, "ons moet na Hagrid se hut toe sluip. Moenie dat iemand jou sien nie, Harry . . ."

Hulle glip suutjies deur die bome aan die kant van die Woud. Toe hulle Hagrid se voordeur net-net kan sien, hoor hulle 'n geklop aan sy deur. Hulle koes agter 'n groot eikeboom se stam weg en loer dan aan weerskante uit. Hagrid staan in sy deur. Hy is bleek en hy bewe en hy kyk rond om te sien wie geklop het. Toe hoor Harry sy eie stem.

"Dis ons. Ons dra die onsigbaarheidsmantel. Laat ons inkom sodat ons dit kan aflaai."

"Julle moes nie gekom het nie!" fluister Hagrid, maar hy gee tog pad en maak die deur weer vinnig toe.

"Dis die raarste ding wat ons nog gedoen het," sê Harry met oortuiging.

"Kom ons gaan nader," fluister Hermien. "Ons moet nader aan Bokbok kom!"

Hulle sluip deur die bome tot hulle die senuagtige Hippogrief sien wat aan die heining om Hagrid se pampoentuin vasgemaak is.

"Nou?" fluister Harry.

"Nee!" sê Hermien. "As ons hom nou al steel, sal daardie komiteelede dink dat Hagrid hom laat gaan het! Ons moet wag tot hulle gesien het dat hy daar buite vasgemaak is."

"Dit laat ons met omtrent sestig sekondes," sê Harry. Dit is besig om na 'n saak van onmoontlikheid te lyk.

Op daardie oomblik hoor hulle die geklater van brekende porselein in Hagrid se hut.

"Dis Hagrid wat die melkbeker breek," fluister Hermien. "Ek gaan nou enige oomblik vir Skille kry —"

En sowaar, 'n paar oomblikke later hoor hulle Hermien se verbaasde uitroep.

"Hermien," sê Harry skielik, "wat as ons — as ons net daar inhardloop en vir Pansegrouw gryp —"

"Nee!" sê Hermien in 'n verskrikte fluisterstem. "Verstaan jy dan nie? Ons is besig om een van die belangrikste towenaarswette te oortree! Niemand is veronderstel om die tyd te verander nie, niemand nie! Jy't gehoor wat Dompeldorius gesê het, as iemand ons moet sien —"

"Dit sal net onself en Hagrid wees!"

“Harry, wat dink jy sal jy doen as jy skielik moet sien hoe jy by Hagrid se hut instorm?” sê Hermien.

“Ek – ek sal dink ek’s mal,” sê Harry, “of ek sal dink dat dit Donker Toewerkuns is –”

“Presies! Jy sal nie weet wat aangaan nie, jy kan jouself dalk aanval! Kan jy dit dan nie verstaan nie? Professor McGonagall het vir my vertel watter akklige goed al gebeur het as townaars met die tyd peuter . . . Tonne van hulle het hulself in die verlede of in die toekoms al per ongeluk vermoor!”

“Oukeil!” sê Harry. “Dit was net ’n idee, ek het net gedink –”

Maar Hermien stamp teen hom en wys na die kasteel. Harry beweeg sy kop ’n aks om die voordeur daar in die verte beter te kan sien. Dompeldorius, Broddelwerk, die ou komiteelid en Macnair, die laksman, kom met die trappe af gestap.

“Ons gaan nou uitkom!” fluister Hermien asemloos.

En sowaar, oomblikke later gaan Hagrid se agterdeur oop en Harry sien hoe hy, Ron en Hermien saam met Hagrid uitstap. Dit is sonder twyfel die vreemdste sensasie van sy lewe om agter ’n boom te staan en homself daar in die pampoentuin te sien staan.

“Alles reg, Bokkie, alles reg . . .” sê Hagrid vir Bokbok. Toe draai hy na Harry, Ron en Hermien. “Toe, toe, weg is julle.”

“Hagrid, ons kan mos nie –”

“Ons sal vir hulle sê wat regtig gebeur het –”

“Hulle kan hom nie wil doodmaak nie –”

“Loop! Dis al erg genoeg sonder dat julle spul ook nog in die moeilikheid kom!”

Harry kyk hoe die Hermien daar in die pampoentuin die onsigbaarheidsmantel oor hom en Ron gooi.

“Maak gou. Moenie luister nie . . .”

Hulle hoor ’n geklop aan Hagrid se voordeur. Die geselskap vir die teregstelling het opgedaag. Hagrid draai om en loop terug na sy hut. Hy laat die agterdeur net op ’n skrefie oop. Harry sien hoe die gras kol-kol om die hut platgetrap word en hoor hoe drie pare voete wegstap. Hy, Ron en Hermien is vort . . . maar die Harry en Hermien wat tussen die bome wegkruip, kan alles wat in die hut aangaan hoor deur die agterdeur wat effens oopstaan.

“Waar is die gedierte?” kom Macnair se koue stem.

“Buite – buitekant,” sê Hagrid skor.

Harry trek sy kop net betyds terug toe Macnair se gesig voor Hagrid se venster verskyn en hy na Bokbok staar. Dan hoor hulle Broddelwerk se stem.

“Ons – h’m – moet die amptelike notisie van teregstelling vir jou lees, Hagrid. Ek sal gou maak. Dan moet jy en Macnair dit teken. Macnair, jy is ook veronderstel om te luister, dis prosedure –”

Macnair se gesig verdwyn van voor die venster. Dit is nou of nooit.

“Wag hier,” fluister Harry vir Hermien. “Ek sal dit doen.”

Toe Broddelwerk se stem weer opklink, glip Harry agter die boom uit, spring oor die pampoentuin se heining en stap na Bokbok toe.

“Dit is die beslissing van die Komitee vir die Vernietiging van Gevaarlike Kreature dat die Hippogrief, Bokbok, hierna bekend as die veroordeelde, teen sonsondergang op die sesde dag van Junie tereggestel sal word –”

Harry is versigtig om nie sy oë te knip toe hy in Bokbok se vurige oranje oog kyk en voor hom buig nie. Bokbok knak sy skubberige knieë en kom dan weer orent. Harry vroetel met die tou waarmee Bokbok aan die boom vasgemaak is.

“... gevonnissen tot die dood by wyse van onthoofding, soos toegepas deur die Komitee se benoemde laksman, Walden Macnair...”

“Komaan, Bokbok,” mompel Harry, “komaan, ons wil jou help. Saggies nou . . . saggies . . .”

“... en voor die nodige getuies. Hagrid, teken hier...”

Harry gooi sy volle gewig teen die tou, maar Bokbok het sy pote ingegrawe.

“Wel, kom ons kry klaar,” sê die skril stem van die komiteelid vanuit Hagrid se hut. “Hagrid, miskien sal dit beter wees as jy hier binne bly –”

“Nee – ek – ek moet by hom wees . . . ek wil nie hê hy moet alleen wees nie –”

Voetstappe klink op uit die hut.

“Bokbok, kom nou!” pleit Harry.

Harry trek nog harder aan die tou om Bokbok se nek. Die Hippogrief begin teësinnig aanstap terwyl hy sy vlerke ergerlik ritsel. Hulle is nog ’n goeie tien tree van die Woud af en duidelik sigbaar vanaf Hagrid se agterdeur.

“Net ’n oomblik, asseblief, Macnair,” kom Dompeldorius se stem. “Jy moet ook teken.” Die voetstappe word stil. Harry rem aan die tou. Bokbok klap met sy snawel, maar stap tog ’n bietjie vinniger.

Hermien se wit gesig loer om ’n boom.

“Harry, maak gou!” prewel sy.

Harry kan Dompeldorius se stem nog daar in die hut hoor. Hy pluk weer aan die tou. Bokbok slaan oor op ’n trae draffie. Hulle is by die bome . . .

“Maak gou! Maak gou!” kerm Hermien en storm uit van agter haar boom. Sy gryp die tou en voeg haar gewig by Harry s’n om Bokbok aan te jaag. Harry loer oor sy skouer; hulle is buite sig; hulle kan Hagrid se tuin glad nie meer sien nie.

“Stop!” fluister hy vir Hermien. “Netnou hoor hulle ons –”

Hagrid se agterdeur gaan met ’n harde slag oop. Harry, Hermien en Bokbok staan doodstil; dit lyk of selfs die Hippogrief aandagtig luister.

Stilte . . . dan –

“Waar is hy?” sê die komiteelid in sy skril stemmetjie. “Waar is die dier?”

“Hy was net hier vasgemaak!” sê die laksman ergerlik. “Ek het hom gesien! Net hier!”

“Hoe vreemd,” sê Dompeldorius. Daar is ’n sweem van geamuseerdheid in sy stem.

“Bokkie!” sê Hagrid skor.

Daar is ’n suigeluid en die gedoef van ’n byl. Dit klink asof die laksman die byl uit woede in die boom vasgeslaan het. Toe klink ’n gekerm op en hierdie keer kan hulle Hagrid se woorde deur sy snikke hoor.

“Weg! Weg! Is dit nie wonderlik nie! Moet losgebreek het! Bokkie, jou slim seunskind!”

Nou rem Bokbok aan die tou soos hy sukkel om na Hagrid toe te gaan. Harry en Hermien klou die tou vaster en slaan hul hakke in die woudvloer om hom teë te hou.

“Iemand het hom losgemaak!” snou die laksman. “Ons moet die terrein deursoek, die Woud –

“Macnair, as Bokbok inderdaad gesteel is, dink jy werklik dat die dief hom te voet sou weglei?” sê Dompeldorius en hy klink nog steeds geamuseerd. “Deursoek die hemele, as jy wil . . . Hagrid, ek kan doen met ’n koppie tee. Of ’n stywe skoot brandewyn.”

“Na-natuurlik, professor,” sê Hagrid wat swak van vreugde klink. “Kom binne, kom binne . . .”

Harry en Hermien luister aandagtig. Hulle hoor voetstappe, die gedempte gevloek van die laksman, die geklik van die deur en toe is alles weer stil.

“Wat nou?” fluister Harry terwyl hy om hom kyk.

“Ons sal hier moet wegkruip,” sê Hermien wat baie bewurig lyk. “Ons sal moet wag tot hulle terug in die kasteel is. Dan moet ons wag tot dit veilig is om met Bokbok na Sirius se venster te vlieg. Hy sal eers oor ’n paar uur daar wees . . . O, dit gaan moeilik wees . . .”

Sy loer senuagtig oor haar skouer na die dieptes van die Woud. Die son is reeds besig om onder te gaan.

“Ons sal moet padgee,” sê Harry wat hard oor alles gedink het. “Ons moet die Woelige Wilg kan sien, anders sal ons nie weet wat aangaan nie.”

“Goed,” sê Hermien en verstewig haar greep op Bokbok se tou. “Maar ons moenie dat iemand ons sien nie, Harry, onthou . . .”

Dit word al donkerder om hulle terwyl hulle om die rand van die Woud glip tot agter ’n klomp bome van waar hulle die Wilg dofweg kan sien.

“Daar is Ron!” sê Hermien meteens.

'n Donker figuur hardloop oor die grasperk en 'n kreet weergalm deur die stil naglug.

"Los hom uit – gaan weg – Skille, kom hier –"

Hulle sien hoe nog twee figure asof van nêrens verskyn. Harry kyk hoe hy en Hermien vir Ron agternasit. Hulle sien hoe Ron deur die lug duik.

"Het jou! Voertsek, jou stinkende kat –"

"Daar's Sirius!" sê Harry. Die hond se groot vorm verskyn tussen die Woelige Wilg se wortels. Hulle sien hoe hy nader storm, vir Harry plat-spring en vir Ron gryp . . .

"Dit lyk nog erger van hier af, nè?" sê Harry terwyl hy kyk hoe die hond vir Ron tussen die wortels insleep. "Eina – kyk, daar slaan die boom vir my – vir jou ook – dit is so eienaardig –"

Die Woelige Wilg kraak en slaan met sy lae takke; hulle sien hoe hulle twee heen en weer dartel om by die stam te probeer kom. Dan vries die boom.

"Dis Kromskeen wat aan die kwas geraak het," sê Hermien.

"Daar gaan ons . . ." mompel Harry. "Ons is in."

Die oomblik toe hulle verdwyn, begin die boom weer beweeg. Oomblikke later hoor hulle voetstappe baie na aan hulle. Dompeldorius, Macnair, Broddelwerk en die ou komiteelid is op pad kasteel toe.

"Net na ons in die tunnel verdwyn het!" sug Hermien. "As Dompeldorius net saam met ons kon gaan . . ."

"Macnair en Broddelwerk sou ook saamgekom het," sê Harry bitter. "Ek wed jou Broddelwerk sou vir Macnair gesê het om vir Sirius net daar te vermoor."

Hulle kyk hoe die vier mans die kasteel se trappe uitklim en verdwyn. Vir 'n paar oomblikke is die toneel verlate. Dan –

"Daar kom Lupin!" sê Harry toe hulle nog 'n figuur met die kliptrappe na onder sien draf na die Woelige Wilg toe. Harry kyk op na die hemel. Die maan is heeltemal verskuil agter wolke.

Hulle kyk hoe Lupin 'n gebreekte tak van die grond af optel en die kwas in die stam daarmee aanraak. Die boom hou op met baklei en ook Lupin verdwyn deur die gaping tussen die wortels.

"As hy net die mantel gevat het," sê Harry. "Dit lê net daar . . ."

Hy kyk na Hermien.

"Wat as ek gou uitglip en dit gaan haal, Snerp sal dit nooit kry nie en dan –"

"Harry, niemand moet ons sien nie!"

"Hoe hou jy dit?" vra Harry ergerlik. "Hoe kan jy net daar staan en kyk hoe alles gebeur?" Hy aarsel. "Ek gaan daardie mantel haal!"

"Harry, nee!"

Hermien gryp die agterkant van Harry se kleed en dit is nie 'n oomblik te gou nie, want op daardie oomblik hoor hulle iemand luidkeels sing.

Dit is Hagrid op pad kasteel toe. Hy sing uit volle bors en swaai effens met elke tree. Hy hou 'n groot bottel tussen sy hande vas.

“Sien!” fluister Hermien. “Sien jy wat sou gebeur het? Ons moenie gesien word nie! Nee, Bokbok!”

Die Hippogrief probeer wild om by Hagrid uit te kom; Harry gryp ook die tou om Bokbok terug te hou. Hulle kyk hoe Hagrid dronkerig na die kasteel toe wals. Dan verdwyn hy. Bokbok probeer nie meer wegkom nie. Sy kop hang lusteloos.

Skaars twee minute later vlieg die kasteel se deure weer eens oop en Snerp kom in volle vaart uitgestorm op pad na die Woelige Wilg toe.

Harry bal sy vuiste toe hy sien hoe Snerp gly-gly langs die boom tot stilstand kom en om hom rondkyk. Hy raap die mantel op en hou dit in die lug.

“Haal jou vieslike vuil hande daarvan af,” grom Harry onderlangs.

“Sjj!”

Snerp gryp die stok waarmee Lupin die boom laat vries het, druk teen die kwas en verdwyn toe hy die mantel om hom sit.

“Dis die einde,” sê Hermien sag. “Nou is ons almal daar onder . . . nou moet ons net wag tot ons weer terugkom . . .”

Sy tel die punt van Bokbok se tou op en maak dit styf aan die naaste boom vas. Dan gaan sit sy met haar arms om haar knieë op die droë grond.

“Harry, daar is iets wat ek nie verstaan nie . . . hoekom het die Dementors nie vir Sirius gekry nie? Ek onthou hoe hulle gekom het, en ek dink ek het flou geword . . . daar was so baie van hulle . . .”

Harry gaan ook sit. Hy verduidelik wat hy gesien het; hoe 'n groot silwer ding oor die meer gegalop het en die Dementors gedwing het om terug te val net toe die naaste Dementor sy mond oor Harry s'n laat sak het.

Teen die tyd dat Harry klaar is, hang Hermien se mond effens oop.

“Maar wat was dit?”

“Daar's net een ding wat die Dementors kan wegjaag,” sê Harry. “'n Patronus, 'n Verskriklike sterke.”

“Maar wie het dit opgetower?”

Harry antwoord nie. Hy dink terug aan die persoon wat hy aan die oorkant van die meer gesien het. Hy dink hy weet wie dit was . . . maar hoe kan dit wees?

“Het jy nie gesien hoe hy lyk nie?” sê Hermien gretig. “Was dit een van ons onderwysers?”

“Nee,” sê Harry. “Dit was nie 'n onderwyser nie.”

“Maar dit moet 'n baie magtige towenaar gewees het om al daardie Dementors weg te jaag . . . as die Patronus so helder was, moet dit mos 'n lig oor hom gegooi het? Kon jy nie sien wie —?”

“Ja, ek het hom gesien,” sê Harry stadig, “maar . . . miskien het ek my

net verbeel . . . ek kon nie helder dink nie . . . en ek het net daarna flou geword . . . ”

“Wie dink jy was dit?”

“Ek dink –” Harry sluk. Hy weet hoe vreemd dit gaan klink. “Ek dink dit was my pa.”

Harry kyk na Hermien en sien dat haar mond nou heeltemal oophang. Sy staar met ’n mengsel van kommer en bejammering na hom.

“Harry, jou pa is – wel – dood,” sê sy saggies.

“Ek weet dit,” sê Harry vinnig.

“Dink jy dat jy sy spook gesien het?”

“Ek weet nie . . . nee . . . hy’t solied gelyk . . . ”

“Maar dan –”

“Ek het my seker maar net verbeel,” sê Harry, “maar van wat ek kon sien . . . het dit baie soos hy gelyk . . . Ek het foto’s van hom . . . ”

Hermien gaap hom nog steeds aan asof sy dink dat hy besig is om sy verstand te verloor.

“Ek weet dit klink mal,” sê Harry eenvoudig. Hy kyk na Bokbok wat sy snawel in die grond steek asof hy wurms soek. Hy hou egter nie regtig vir Bokbok dop nie.

Hy dink aan sy pa en aan sy drie grootste vriende . . . Maantjie, Wurmstert, Kussingvoet en Gaffel . . . Was al vier van hulle dalk vannag hier op die terrein? Wurmstert het weer verskyn nadat almal gedink het dat hy dood is – is dit so onmoontlik dat sy pa dieselfde kon doen? Het hy bloot gesigte daar aan die oorkant van die meer gesien? Die figuur was te ver weg om dit duidelik uit te maak . . . maar tog was hy seker, vir ’n oomblik, voor hy sy bewussyn verloor het.

Bokant hom ritsel die blare saggies in die wind. Die maan verskyn en verdwyn agter die wolke. Hermien sit en wag met haar oë op die Wilg. Uiteindelik, na meer as ’n uur . . .

“Hier kom ons,” fluister Hermien.

Sy en Harry kom orent. Bokbok lig sy kop. Hulle sien hoe Lupin, Ron en Pansegrouw sukkelend deur die gat in die wortels klim. Dan kom Hermien . . . daarna sweef die bewustelose Snerp spookagtig opwaarts. Toe kom Harry en Swardt. Hulle begin aanstap kasteel toe.

Harry se hart klop al vinniger. Hy kyk na die hemel. Enige oomblik gaan daardie wolk wegbeweeg en dan gaan die maan . . .

“Harry,” prewel Hermien asof sy presies weet wat hy dink, “ons moet hier bly. Hulle mag ons nie sien nie. Daar is niks wat ons kan doen nie . . . ”

“Ons moet dus vir Pansegrouw net weer van voor af laat ontsnap . . . ” sê Harry gedemp.

“Hoe gaan jy miskien ’n rot in die donkerte vang?” kap Hermien tee. “Daar is niks wat ons kan doen nie! Ons het teruggekom om vir Sirius te help. Ons is nie veronderstel om enige kanse te waag nie!”

"Goed dan!"

Die maan glip uit van agter die wolk. Hulle sien hoe die klein figuurtjies aan die oorkant van die terrein vassteek. Dan sien hulle 'n beweging –

"Daar gaan Lupin," fluister Hermien. "Hy transformeer –"

"Hermien!" sê Harry meteens. "Ons moet padgee!"

"Ons moenie, ek sê nog die hele tyd vir jou –"

"Om nie in te meng nie! Maar Lupin gaan reguit. Woud toe hardloop, reguit op ons af!"

Hermien snak na asem.

"Gou!" kerm sy en storm nader om Bokbok se tou los te maak. "Gou! Waarheen sal ons gaan? Waar gaan ons wegkruip? Die Dementors gaan enige oomblik hier wees –"

"Terug na Hagrid se hut!" sê Harry. "Dis leeg – komaan!"

Hulle hardloop so vinnig as wat hul bene hulle kan dra terwyl Bokbok langs hulle galop. Agter hulle hoor hulle die weerwolf huil.

Daar is die hut. Harry gly tot teen die deur, ruk dit oop en Hermien en Bokbok storm verby hom; Harry slinger homself agterna en sluit die deur. Tande, die beerhond, blaf hard.

"Sjy, Tande, dis ons!" sê Hermien terwyl sy vinnig na hom gaan en hom tussen die ore krap sodat hy moet bedaar. "Dit was amper," sê sy vir Harry.

"H'm . . ." Harry kyk deur die venster. Dit is moeilik om van hier af te sien wat aangaan. Bokbok lyk baie in sy skik nou dat hy terug in Hagrid se hut is. Hy gaan lê voor die vuur, vou sy vlerke tevrede toe en lyk asof hy regmaak vir 'n slapie.

"Ek dink ek moet weer uitgaan, weet jy," sê Harry stadig. "Ek kan nie sien wat aangaan nie – ons sal nie weet wanneer dit tyd is om –"

Hermien kyk op. Daar is 'n agterdogtige trek op haar gesig.

"Ek gaan nie probeer om in te meng nie," sê Harry gou. "Maar as ons nie weet aangaan nie, hoe sal ons weet wanneer dit tyd is om vir Sirius te gaan red?"

"Wel . . . oukei . . . ek sal hier by Bokbok bly . . . Maar Harry, wees versigtig – daar's 'n weerwolf daar buite – en die Dementors –"

Harry stap uit en skuifel om die kant van die hut. Hy hoor 'n getjank in die verte. Dit moet beteken dat die Dementors besig is om Sirius in te haal . . . hy en Hermien sal enige oomblik na hom toe hardloop.

Harry staar oor die meer en sy hart slaan tamboer in sy bors. Wie ook al daardie Patronus gestuur het, sal enige oomblik verskyn.

Vir 'n breukdeel van 'n sekonde staan hy besluiteloos langs Hagrid se hut. Jy moenie gesien word nie. Maar hy wil nie gesien wees nie. Hy wil self iets sien . . . hy moet weet . . .

En daar is die Dementors. Hulle kom uit alle rigtings in die duister en gly om die kante van die meer . . . hulle beweeg weg van waar Harry staan

na die oorkantse oewer . . . hy hoef nie naby hulle te kom nie . . .

Harry begin hardloop. Hy het geen ander gedagte in sy kop as sy pa nie . . . As dit hy is . . . as dit regtig hy is . . . hy moet weet, hy moet uitvind . . .

Die meer kom al nader, maar daar is nog steeds nie 'n teken van enigiemand nie. Aan die oorkantste wal kan hy klein spatseltjies silwer sien – sy eie poging tot 'n Patronus –

Daar staan 'n bos aan die waterkant. Harry gooi homself daaragter neer en tuur desperaat deur die blare. Die silwer spatsels aan die oorkant het skielik verdwyn. 'n Gevoel van opwinding en vrees skiet deur hom – enige oomblik nou –

“Komaan!” prewel hy terwyl hy om hom kyk. “Waar is jy, Pa, komaan!”

Niemand kom nie. Harry lig sy kop en kyk na die kring Dementors aan die ander kant van die meer. Een van hulle het sy kap laat sak. Dit is tyd dat die redder moet verskyn – maar hierdie keer kom niemand om hom te help nie –

Dan tref dit hom – en hy verstaan. Dit was nie sy pa wat hy gesien het nie – hy het homself gesien.

Harry vlieg agter die bos uit en bring sy towerstaf te voorskyn.

“EXPECTO PATRONUM!” gil hy.

En uit die punt van sy towerstaf bars, nie 'n vormlose wolk nie, maar 'n verblindende, glinsterende, silwer dier. Harry trek sy oë op skrefies om te sien wat dit is. Dit lyk soos 'n perd. Hy galop stil weg van hom af oor die swart oppervlak van die meer. Hy sien hoe die dier sy kop laat sak en op die swerm Dementors afstorm . . . nou galop hy om en om die swart vorms daar op die grond sodat die Dementors terugval, uitmekaar spat, die duisternis in glip . . . en verdwyn.

Die Patronus draai om. Dit galop terug oor die stil oppervlak van die meer reguit na Harry toe. Dit is nie 'n perd nie. Dis ook nie 'n eenhoring nie. Dis 'n takbok. Hy skyn so helder soos die maan daarbo . . . hy kom reguit na hom toe.

Op die wal steek hy vas. Sy hoewe het nie 'n merk op die grond gemaak nie en hy staar met groot silwer oë na Harry. Stadig laat sak die dier sy kop met die horings. Dan besef Harry . . .

“Gaffel,” fluister hy.

Toe hy egter sy bewende vingerpunte na die dier uithou, het hy verdwyn.

Harry staan daar met sy hand nog steeds uitgestrek voor hom. Toe, en dit laat sy hart hewig skop, hoor hy hoewe agter hom – hy swaai vinnig om en sien hoe Hermien nader kom met Bokbok wat sy agter haar aansleep.

“Wat het jy gedoen?” sê sy ergerlik. “Jy't gesê jy gaan net kyk wat aan gaan!”

“Ek het so pas ons almal se lewens gered . . .” sê Harry. “Kom staan hier – hier agter die bos – ek sal verduidelik.”

Hermien luister na wat gebeur het, met ’n mond wat weer eens wyd oop hang.

“Het enigiemand jou gesien?”

“Ja, het jy nie geluister nie? Ek het *myself* gesien, maar ek het gedink dis my pa! Dis alles oukei!”

“Harry, ek kan dit nie glo nie – jy het ’n Patronus opgetower wat al daardie Dementors weggejaag het! Dit is uiters, *uiters* gevorderde towerwerk . . .”

“Ek het hierdie keer geweet ek kan dit doen,” sê Harry, “want ek het dit reeds tevore reggekry . . . Maak dit sin?”

“Ek weet nie – Harry, kyk vir Snerp!”

Hulle loer saam om die bos na die oorkantste wal. Snerp het bygekom. Hy is besig om draagbare op te tower en om die slap vorms van Harry, Hermien en Swardt daarop te tel. ’n Vierde draagbaar sweef reeds langs hom. Dit moet Ron wees wat daarop lê. Toe, met sy towerstaf uitgestrek voor hom, laat hy hulle kasteel toe beweeg.

“Goed, dis amper tyd,” sê Hermien gespanne en loer na haar horlosie. “Ons het vyf-en-veertig minute voor Dompeldorius die siekeboeg se deur gaan toesluit. Ons moet vir Sirius red en terug wees in die saal voordat enigiemand agterkom dat ons weg is . . .”

Hulle wag, en kyk na die wolke se weerkaatsing in die meer terwyl die bos langs hulle in die briesie ritsel. Bokbok is verveeld en soek na wurms.

“Dink jy hy’s al daar?” sê Harry en loer na sy horlosie. Hy kyk op na die kasteel en begin om die vensters regs van die Westoring te tel.

“Kyk!” fluister Hermien. “Wie’s dit? Iemand het agter by die kasteel uitgekom!”

Harry tuur die donkerte in. Die man haas hom oor die terrein in die rigting van een van die ingange. Iets blink skitter in sy gordel.

“Macnair!” sê Harry. “Die laksman! Hy’t die Dementors gaan haal! Kom, Hermien –”

Hermien sit haar hande op Bokbok se rug en Harry help haar op. Dan trap hy met sy voet op een van die bos se lae takke en klouter voor haar op. Hy trek Bokbok se tou na agter oor sy nek en maak die punt soos teuels aan die ander kant van sy halsband vas.

“Gereed?” fluister hy vir Hermien. “Jy moet aan my vashou, hoor –”

Hy pomp vir Bokbok met sy hakke in die ribbes.

Bokbok styg reguit in die donker lug op. Harry knyp sy flanke met sy knieë vas en voel hoe kragtig die groot vlerke onder hulle beweeg. Hermien hou vir Harry styf om die middel vas; hy kan haar hoor prewel. “O, nee – ek hou net niks hiervan nie – o, ek hou *regtig* niks hiervan nie –”

Harry por vir Bokbok aan. Hulle pyl suutjies op die kasteel se boonste

verdiepings af. Harry pluk hard aan die linkerkant van die teuels en Bokbok swenk. Harry probeer die vensters tel soos hulle verbyvlieg –

“Hokaai!” sê hy dan en trek so hard as wat hy kan terug.

Bokbok beweeg stadiger en kom dan tot stilstand; behalwe dat hulle die hele tyd op en af beweeg soos Bokbok sy vlerke klap om min of meer op een plek in die lug te bly hang.

“Daar’s hy!” sê Harry wat Sirius gesien het toe hulle voor die venster verbygegaan het. Hy steek sy hand uit en toe Bokbok se vlerke weer afwaarts beweeg, tik hy vinnig teen die glas.

Swardt kyk op. Harry sien hoe sy mond oopval en hoe hy van sy stoel af opspring, hom na die venster haas en probeer om dit oop te maak. Dit is egter gesluit.

“Gee pad!” roep Hermien uit. Sy haal haar towerstaf uit terwyl sy die hele tyd met haar linkerhand aan Harry se kleed vashou.

“Alohomora!”

Die venster spring oop.

“Hoe – hoe –?” sê Swardt floutjies en staar na die Hippogrief.

“Klim op – daar’s nie meer baie tyd nie,” sê Harry. Hy gryp vir Bokbok ferm aan weerskante van sy gladde nek om hom so stil moontlik te hou. “Jy moet wegkom – die Dementors is op pad. Macnair het hulle gaan haal.”

Swardt druk met ’n hand aan weerskante van die raam en swaai sy kop en skouers deur die venster. Dit is ’n geluk dat hy so maer is. Hy gooi sy been in ’n oogwenk oor Bokbok se blaaië en laat sak homself agter Hermien op die Hippogrief se rug.

“Goed, Bokbok, op!” sê Harry en skud die tou. “Tot op die toring – komaan!”

Die Hippogrief gee een swaai met sy kragtige vlerke en hulle styg op, so hoog soos die bokant van die Westoring. Bokbok land met ’n geklater op die kantele en Harry en Hermien gly onmiddellik af.

“Sirius, jy moet gaan, dadelik,” sê Harry hygend. “Hulle gaan enige oomblik in Flickerpitt se kantoor wees en dan is die gort gaar.”

Bokbok kap met sy pote op die grond en gooi sy kop agteroor.

“Wat het van die ander seun geword? Ron?” vra Sirius dringend.

“Hy’s oukei – hy’s nog bewusteloos, maar Madame Pomfrey het gesê sy sal hom gesond kry. Gou – weg is jy!”

Swardt staar egter nog steeds na Harry.

“Hoe kan ek jou ooit bedank –”

“GAAN!” skree Harry en Hermien tesame.

Swardt swaai vir Bokbok om en tuur na die oop hemel.

“Ons sal mekaar weer sien,” sê hy. “Jy is – voorwaar jou pa se seun, Harry . . .”

Hy pomp vir Bokbok met sy hakke in die ribbes. Toe die enorme vler-

ke weer eens oopgaan, spring Harry en Hermien agteruit . . . die Hippo-
grief styg die lug in . . . hy en sy ruiter word kleiner en kleiner terwyl
Harry hulle agterna kyk . . . dan skuif 'n wolk voor die maan in . . . en
hulle is weg.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO



OWL POST AGAIN

Harry!"

Hermione was tugging at his sleeve, staring at her watch. "We've got exactly ten minutes to get back down to the hospital wing without anybody seeing us — before Dumbledore locks the door —"

"Okay," said Harry, wrenching his gaze from the sky, "let's go."

They slipped through the doorway behind them and down a tightly spiraling stone staircase. As they reached the bottom of it, they heard voices. They flattened themselves against the wall and listened. It sounded like Fudge and Snape. They were walking quickly along the corridor at the foot of the staircase.

"... only hope Dumbledore's not going to make difficulties,"

Snape was saying. "The Kiss will be performed immediately?"

“As soon as Macnair returns with the dementors. This whole Black affair has been highly embarrassing. I can’t tell you how much I’m looking forward to informing the *Daily Prophet* that we’ve got him at last. . . . I daresay they’ll want to interview you, Snape . . . and once young Harry’s back in his right mind, I expect he’ll want to tell the *Prophet* exactly how you saved him. . . .”

Harry clenched his teeth. He caught a glimpse of Snape’s smirk as he and Fudge passed Harry and Hermione’s hiding place. Their footsteps died away. Harry and Hermione waited a few moments to make sure they’d really gone, then started to run in the opposite direction. Down one staircase, then another, along a new corridor — then they heard a cackling ahead.

“Peeves!” Harry muttered, grabbing Hermione’s wrist. “In here!”

They tore into a deserted classroom to their left just in time. Peeves seemed to be bouncing along the corridor in boisterous good spirits, laughing his head off.

“Oh, he’s horrible,” whispered Hermione, her ear to the door. “I bet he’s all excited because the dementors are going to finish off Sirius. . . .” She checked her watch. “Three minutes, Harry!”

They waited until Peeves’s gloating voice had faded into the distance, then slid back out of the room and broke into a run again.

“Hermione — what’ll happen — if we don’t get back inside — before Dumbledore locks the door?” Harry panted.

“I don’t want to think about it!” Hermione moaned, checking her watch again. “One minute!”

They had reached the end of the corridor with the hospital wing entrance. “Okay — I can hear Dumbledore,” said Hermione tensely.

“Come on, Harry!”

They crept along the corridor. The door opened. Dumbledore’s back appeared.

“I am going to lock you in,” they heard him saying. “It is five minutes to midnight. Miss Granger, three turns should do it. Good luck.”

Dumbledore backed out of the room, closed the door, and took out his wand to magically lock it. Panicking, Harry and Hermione ran forward. Dumbledore looked up, and a wide smile appeared under the long silver mustache. “Well?” he said quietly.

“We did it!” said Harry breathlessly. “Sirius has gone, on Buckbeak . . .”

Dumbledore beamed at them.

“Well done. I think —” He listened intently for any sound within the hospital wing. “Yes, I think you’ve gone too — get inside — I’ll lock you in —”

Harry and Hermione slipped back inside the dormitory. It was empty except for Ron, who was still lying motionless in the end bed. As the lock clicked behind them, Harry and Hermione crept back to their own beds, Hermione tucking the Time-Turner back under her robes. A moment later, Madam Pomfrey came striding back out of her office.

“Did I hear the headmaster leaving? Am I allowed to look after my patients now?”

She was in a very bad mood. Harry and Hermione thought it best to accept their chocolate quietly. Madam Pomfrey stood over them, making sure they ate it. But Harry could hardly swallow. He and

Hermione were waiting, listening, their nerves jangling. . . . And then, as they both took a fourth piece of chocolate from Madam Pomfrey, they heard a distant roar of fury echoing from somewhere above them. . . .

“What was that?” said Madam Pomfrey in alarm.

Now they could hear angry voices, growing louder and louder. Madam Pomfrey was staring at the door.

“Really — they’ll wake everybody up! What do they think they’re doing?”

Harry was trying to hear what the voices were saying. They were drawing nearer —

“He must have Disapparated, Severus. We should have left somebody in the room with him. When this gets out —”

“HE DIDN’T DISAPPARATE!” Snape roared, now very close at hand. “YOU CAN’T APPARATE *OR* DISAPPARATE INSIDE THIS CASTLE! THIS — HAS — SOMETHING — TO — DO — WITH — POTTER!”

“Severus — be reasonable — Harry has been locked up —”

BAM.

The door of the hospital wing burst open.

Fudge, Snape, and Dumbledore came striding into the ward. Dumbledore alone looked calm. Indeed, he looked as though he was quite enjoying himself. Fudge appeared angry. But Snape was beside himself.

“OUT WITH IT, POTTER!” he bellowed. “WHAT DID YOU DO?”

“Professor Snape!” shrieked Madam Pomfrey. “Control yourself!”

“See here, Snape, be reasonable,” said Fudge. “This door’s been locked, we just saw —”

“THEY HELPED HIM ESCAPE, I KNOW IT!” Snape howled, pointing at Harry and Hermione. His face was twisted; spit was flying from his mouth.

“Calm down, man!” Fudge barked. “You’re talking nonsense!”

“YOU DON’T KNOW POTTER!” shrieked Snape. “HE DID IT, I KNOW HE DID IT —”

“That will do, Severus,” said Dumbledore quietly. “Think about what you are saying. This door has been locked since I left the ward ten minutes ago. Madam Pomfrey, have these students left their beds?”

“Of course not!” said Madam Pomfrey, bristling. “I would have heard them!”

“Well, there you have it, Severus,” said Dumbledore calmly. “Unless you are suggesting that Harry and Hermione are able to be in two places at once, I’m afraid I don’t see any point in troubling them further.”

Snape stood there, seething, staring from Fudge, who looked thoroughly shocked at his behavior, to Dumbledore, whose eyes were twinkling behind his glasses. Snape whirled about, robes swishing behind him, and stormed out of the ward.

“Fellow seems quite unbalanced,” said Fudge, staring after him. “I’d watch out for him if I were you, Dumbledore.”

“Oh, he’s not unbalanced,” said Dumbledore quietly. “He’s just suffered a severe disappointment.”

“He’s not the only one!” puffed Fudge. “The *Daily Prophet*’s going

to have a field day! We had Black cornered and he slipped through our fingers yet again! All it needs now is for the story of that hippogriff's escape to get out, and I'll be a laughingstock! Well . . . I'd better go and notify the Ministry . . .”

“And the dementors?” said Dumbledore. “They'll be removed from the school, I trust?”

“Oh yes, they'll have to go,” said Fudge, running his fingers distractedly through his hair. “Never dreamed they'd attempt to administer the Kiss on an innocent boy . . . Completely out of control . . . no, I'll have them packed off back to Azkaban tonight. Perhaps we should think about dragons at the school entrance. . .”

“Hagrid would like that,” said Dumbledore with a swift smile at Harry and Hermione. As he and Fudge left the dormitory, Madam Pomfrey hurried to the door and locked it again. Muttering angrily to herself, she headed back to her office.

There was a low moan from the other end of the ward. Ron had woken up. They could see him sitting up, rubbing his head, looking around.

“What — what happened?” he groaned. “Harry? Why are we in here? Where's Sirius? Where's Lupin? What's going on?”

Harry and Hermione looked at each other.

“You explain,” said Harry, helping himself to some more chocolate.

When Harry, Ron, and Hermione left the hospital wing at noon the next day, it was to find an almost deserted castle. The sweltering heat and the end of the exams meant that everyone was taking full

advantage of another Hogsmeade visit. Neither Ron nor Hermione felt like going, however, so they and Harry wandered onto the grounds, still talking about the extraordinary events of the previous night and wondering where Sirius and Buckbeak were now. Sitting near the lake, watching the giant squid waving its tentacles lazily above the water, Harry lost the thread of the conversation as he looked across to the opposite bank. The stag had galloped toward him from there just last night. . . .

A shadow fell across them and they looked up to see a very bleary-eyed Hagrid, mopping his sweaty face with one of his tablecloth-sized handkerchiefs and beaming down at them.

“Know I shouldn’ feel happy, after wha’ happened las’ night,” he said. “I mean, Black escapin’ again, an’ everythin’ — but guess what?”

“What?” they said, pretending to look curious.

“Beaky! He escaped! He’s free! Bin celebratin’ all night!”

“That’s wonderful!” said Hermione, giving Ron a reproving look because he looked as though he was close to laughing.

“Yeah . . . can’t’ve tied him up properly,” said Hagrid, gazing happily out over the grounds. “I was worried this mornin’, mind . . . thought he mighta met Professor Lupin on the grounds, but Lupin says he never ate anythin’ las’ night. . . .”

“What?” said Harry quickly.

“Blimey, haven’ yeh heard?” said Hagrid, his smile fading a little. He lowered his voice, even though there was nobody in sight. “Er — Snape told all the Slytherins this mornin’. . . . Thought everyone’d know by now . . . Professor Lupin’s a werewolf, see. An’ he was

loose on the grounds las' night. . . . He's packin' now, o' course."

"He's *packing*?" said Harry, alarmed. "Why?"

"Leavin', isn' he?" said Hagrid, looking surprised that Harry had to ask. "Resigned firs' thing this mornin'. Says he can't risk it happenin' again."

Harry scrambled to his feet.

"I'm going to see him," he said to Ron and Hermione.

"But if he's resigned —"

"— doesn't sound like there's anything we can do —"

"I don't care. I still want to see him. I'll meet you back here."

Lupin's office door was open. He had already packed most of his things. The grindylow's empty tank stood next to his battered old suitcase, which was open and nearly full. Lupin was bending over something on his desk and looked up only when Harry knocked on the door.

"I saw you coming," said Lupin, smiling. He pointed to the parchment he had been poring over. It was the Marauder's Map.

"I just saw Hagrid," said Harry. "And he said you'd resigned. It's not true, is it?"

"I'm afraid it is," said Lupin. He started opening his desk drawers and taking out the contents.

"*Why*?" said Harry. "The Ministry of Magic don't think you were helping Sirius, do they?"

Lupin crossed to the door and closed it behind Harry.

"No. Professor Dumbledore managed to convince Fudge that I was trying to save your lives." He sighed. "That was the final straw for

Severus. I think the loss of the Order of Merlin hit him hard. So he — er — *accidentally* let slip that I am a werewolf this morning at breakfast.”

“You’re not leaving just because of that!” said Harry.

Lupin smiled wryly.

“This time tomorrow, the owls will start arriving from parents. They will not want a werewolf teaching their children, Harry. And after last night, I see their point. I could have bitten any of you. That must never happen again.”

“You’re the best Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher we’ve ever had!” said Harry. “Don’t go!”

Lupin shook his head and didn’t speak. He carried on emptying his drawers. Then, while Harry was trying to think of a good argument to make him stay, Lupin said, “From what the headmaster told me this morning, you saved a lot of lives last night, Harry. If I’m proud of anything, it’s how much you’ve learned. Tell me about your Patronus.”

“How d’you know about that?” said Harry, distracted.

“What else could have driven the dementors back?”

Harry told Lupin what had happened. When he’d finished, Lupin was smiling again.

“Yes, your father was always a stag when he transformed,” he said. “You guessed right . . . that’s why we called him Prongs.”

Lupin threw his last few books into his case, closed the desk drawers, and turned to look at Harry.

“Here — I brought this from the Shrieking Shack last night,” he said, handing Harry back the Invisibility Cloak. “And . . .” He

hesitated; then held out the Marauder's Map too. "I am no longer your teacher, so I don't feel guilty about giving you this back as well. It's no use to me, and I daresay you, Ron, and Hermione will find uses for it."

Harry took the map and grinned.

"You told me Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, and Prongs would've wanted to lure me out of school . . . you said they'd have thought it was funny."

"And so we would have," said Lupin, now reaching down to close his case. "I have no hesitation in saying that James would have been highly disappointed if his son had never found any of the secret passages out of the castle."

There was a knock on the door. Harry hastily stuffed the Marauder's Map and the Invisibility Cloak into his pocket.

It was Professor Dumbledore. He didn't look surprised to see Harry there.

"Your carriage is at the gates, Remus," he said.

"Thank you, Headmaster."

Lupin picked up his old suitcase and the empty grindylow tank.

"Well — good-bye, Harry," he said, smiling. "It has been a real pleasure teaching you. I feel sure we'll meet again sometime. Headmaster, there is no need to see me to the gates, I can manage. . . ."

Harry had the impression that Lupin wanted to leave as quickly as possible.

"Good-bye, then, Remus," said Dumbledore soberly. Lupin shifted the grindylow tank slightly so that he and Dumbledore could shake

hands. Then, with a final nod to Harry and a swift smile, Lupin left the office.

Harry sat down in his vacated chair, staring glumly at the floor. He heard the door close and looked up. Dumbledore was still there.

“Why so miserable, Harry?” he said quietly. “You should be very proud of yourself after last night.”

“It didn’t make any difference,” said Harry bitterly. “Pettigrew got away.”

“Didn’t make any difference?” said Dumbledore quietly. “It made all the difference in the world, Harry. You helped uncover the truth. You saved an innocent man from a terrible fate.”

Terrible. Something stirred in Harry’s memory. *Greater and more terrible than ever before . . .* Professor Trelawney’s prediction!

“Professor Dumbledore — yesterday, when I was having my Divination exam, Professor Trelawney went very — very strange.”

“Indeed?” said Dumbledore. “Er — stranger than usual, you mean?”

“Yes . . . her voice went all deep and her eyes rolled and she said . . . she said Voldemort’s servant was going to set out to return to him before midnight . . . She said the servant would help him come back to power.” Harry stared up at Dumbledore. “And then she sort of became normal again, and she couldn’t remember anything she’d said. Was it — was she making a real prediction?”

Dumbledore looked mildly impressed.

“Do you know, Harry, I think she might have been,” he said thoughtfully. “Who’d have thought it? That brings her total of real predictions up to two. I should offer her a pay raise. . . .”

“But —” Harry looked at him, aghast. How could Dumbledore take this so calmly?

“But — I stopped Sirius and Professor Lupin from killing Pettigrew! That makes it my fault if Voldemort comes back!”

“It does not,” said Dumbledore quietly. “Hasn’t your experience with the Time-Turner taught you anything, Harry? The consequences of our actions are always so complicated, so diverse, that predicting the future is a very difficult business indeed. . . . Professor Trelawney, bless her, is living proof of that. . . . You did a very noble thing, in saving Pettigrew’s life.”

“But if he helps Voldemort back to power — !”

“Pettigrew owes his life to you. You have sent Voldemort a deputy who is in your debt. When one wizard saves another wizard’s life, it creates a certain bond between them . . . and I’m much mistaken if Voldemort wants his servant in the debt of Harry Potter.”

“I don’t want a bond with Pettigrew!” said Harry. “He betrayed my parents!”

“This is magic at its deepest, its most impenetrable, Harry. But trust me . . . the time may come when you will be very glad you saved Pettigrew’s life.”

Harry couldn’t imagine when that would be. Dumbledore looked as though he knew what Harry was thinking.

“I knew your father very well, both at Hogwarts and later, Harry,” he said gently. “He would have saved Pettigrew too, I am sure of it.”

Harry looked up at him. Dumbledore wouldn’t laugh — he could tell Dumbledore . . .

“Last night . . . I thought it was my dad who’d conjured my

Patronus. I mean, when I saw myself across the lake . . . I thought I was seeing him.”

“An easy mistake to make,” said Dumbledore softly. “I expect you’ll tire of hearing it, but you do look *extraordinarily* like James. Except for the eyes . . . you have your mother’s eyes.”

Harry shook his head.

“It was stupid, thinking it was him,” he muttered. “I mean, I knew he was dead.”

“You think the dead we have loved ever truly leave us? You think that we don’t recall them more clearly than ever in times of great trouble? Your father is alive in you, Harry, and shows himself most plainly when you have need of him. How else could you produce that *particular* Patronus? Prongs rode again last night.”

It took a moment for Harry to realize what Dumbledore had said.

“Last night Sirius told me all about how they became Animagi,” said Dumbledore, smiling. “An extraordinary achievement — not least, keeping it quiet from me. And then I remembered the most unusual form your Patronus took, when it charged Mr. Malfoy down at your Quidditch match against Ravenclaw. So you did see your father last night, Harry. . . . You found him inside yourself.”

And Dumbledore left the office, leaving Harry to his very confused thoughts.

Nobody at Hogwarts knew the truth of what had happened the night that Sirius, Buckbeak, and Pettigrew had vanished except Harry, Ron, Hermione, and Professor Dumbledore. As the end of term approached, Harry heard many different theories about what had

really happened, but none of them came close to the truth.

Malfoy was furious about Buckbeak. He was convinced that Hagrid had found a way of smuggling the hippogriff to safety, and seemed outraged that he and his father had been outwitted by a gamekeeper. Percy Weasley, meanwhile, had much to say on the subject of Sirius's escape.

"If I manage to get into the Ministry, I'll have a lot of proposals to make about Magical Law Enforcement!" he told the only person who would listen — his girlfriend, Penelope.

Though the weather was perfect, though the atmosphere was so cheerful, though he knew they had achieved the near impossible in helping Sirius to freedom, Harry had never approached the end of a school year in worse spirits.

He certainly wasn't the only one who was sorry to see Professor Lupin go. The whole of Harry's Defense Against the Dark Arts class was miserable about his resignation.

"Wonder what they'll give us next year?" said Seamus Finnigan gloomily.

"Maybe a vampire," suggested Dean Thomas hopefully.

It wasn't only Professor Lupin's departure that was weighing on Harry's mind. He couldn't help thinking a lot about Professor Trelawney's prediction. He kept wondering where Pettigrew was now, whether he had sought sanctuary with Voldemort yet. But the thing that was lowering Harry's spirits most of all was the prospect of returning to the Dursleys. For maybe half an hour, a glorious half hour, he had believed he would be living with Sirius from now on . . . his parents' best friend. . . . It would have been the next best

thing to having his own father back. And while no news of Sirius was definitely good news, because it meant he had successfully gone into hiding, Harry couldn't help feeling miserable when he thought of the home he might have had, and the fact that it was now impossible.

The exam results came out on the last day of term. Harry, Ron, and Hermione had passed every subject. Harry was amazed that he had got through Potions. He had a shrewd suspicion that Dumbledore might have stepped in to stop Snape failing him on purpose. Snape's behavior toward Harry over the past week had been quite alarming. Harry wouldn't have thought it possible that Snape's dislike for him could increase, but it certainly had. A muscle twitched unpleasantly at the corner of Snape's thin mouth every time he looked at Harry, and he was constantly flexing his fingers, as though itching to place them around Harry's throat.

Percy had got his top-grade N.E.W.T.s; Fred and George had scraped a handful of O.W.L.s each. Gryffindor House, meanwhile, largely thanks to their spectacular performance in the Quidditch Cup, had won the House Championship for the third year running. This meant that the end of term feast took place amid decorations of scarlet and gold; and that the Gryffindor table was the noisiest of the lot, as everybody celebrated. Even Harry managed to forget about the journey back to the Dursleys the next day as he ate, drank, talked, and laughed with the rest.

As the Hogwarts Express pulled out of the station the next morning, Hermione gave Harry and Ron some surprising news.

"I went to see Professor McGonagall this morning, just before breakfast. I've decided to drop Muggle Studies."

"But you passed your exam with three hundred and twenty percent!" said Ron.

"I know," sighed Hermione, "but I can't stand another year like this one. That Time-Turner, it was driving me mad. I've handed it in. Without Muggle Studies and Divination, I'll be able to have a normal schedule again."

"I still can't *believe* you didn't tell us about it," said Ron grumpily. "We're supposed to be your *friends*."

"I promised I wouldn't tell *anyone*," said Hermione severely. She looked around at Harry, who was watching Hogwarts disappear from view behind a mountain. Two whole months before he'd see it again. . . .

"Oh, cheer up, Harry!" said Hermione sadly.

"I'm okay," said Harry quickly. "Just thinking about the holidays."

"Yeah, I've been thinking about them too," said Ron. "Harry, you've got to come and stay with us. I'll fix it up with Mum and Dad, then I'll call you. I know how to use a fellytone now —"

"A *telephone*, Ron," said Hermione. "Honestly, *you* should take Muggle Studies next year. . . ."

Ron ignored her.

"It's the Quidditch World Cup this summer! How about it, Harry? Come and stay, and we'll go and see it! Dad can usually get tickets from work."

This proposal had the effect of cheering Harry up a great deal.

"Yeah . . . I bet the Dursleys'd be pleased to let me come . . . especially after what I did to Aunt Marge. . . ."

Feeling considerably more cheerful, Harry joined Ron and

Hermione in several games of Exploding Snap, and when the witch with the tea cart arrived, he bought himself a very large lunch, though nothing with chocolate in it.

But it was late in the afternoon before the thing that made him truly happy turned up. . . .

“Harry,” said Hermione suddenly, peering over his shoulder. “What’s that thing outside your window?”

Harry turned to look outside. Something very small and gray was bobbing in and out of sight beyond the glass. He stood up for a better look and saw that it was a tiny owl, carrying a letter that was much too big for it. The owl was so small, in fact, that it kept tumbling over in the air, buffeted this way and that in the train’s slipstream. Harry quickly pulled down the window, stretched out his arm, and caught it. It felt like a very fluffy Snitch. He brought it carefully inside. The owl dropped its letter onto Harry’s seat and began zooming around their compartment, apparently very pleased with itself for accomplishing its task. Hedwig clicked her beak with a sort of dignified disapproval. Crookshanks sat up in his seat, following the owl with his great yellow eyes. Ron, noticing this, snatched the owl safely out of harm’s way.

Harry picked up the letter. It was addressed to him. He ripped open the letter, and shouted, “It’s from Sirius!”

“What?” said Ron and Hermione excitedly. “Read it aloud!”

Dear Harry,

*I hope this finds you before you reach your aunt and uncle.
I don’t know whether they’re used to owl post.*

Buckbeak and I are in hiding. I won't tell you where, in case this falls into the wrong hands. I have some doubt about the owl's reliability, but he is the best I could find, and he did seem eager for the job.

I believe the dementors are still searching for me, but they haven't a hope of finding me here. I am planning to allow some Muggles to glimpse me soon, a long way from Hogwarts, so that the security on the castle will be lifted.

There is something I never got around to telling you during our brief meeting. It was I who sent you the Firebolt —

“Ha!” said Hermione triumphantly. “See! I *told* you it was from him!”

“Yes, but he hadn't jinxed it, had he?” said Ron. “Ouch!”

The tiny owl, now hooting happily in his hand, had nibbled one of his fingers in what it seemed to think was an affectionate way.

Crookshanks took the order to the Owl Office for me. I used your name but told them to take the gold from Gringotts vault number seven hundred and eleven — my own. Please consider it as thirteen birthdays' worth of presents from your godfather.

I would also like to apologize for the fright I think I gave you that night last year when you left your uncle's house. I had only hoped to get a glimpse of you before starting my journey north, but I think the sight of me alarmed you.

I am enclosing something else for you, which I think will make your next year at Hogwarts more enjoyable.

If ever you need me, send word. Your owl will find me.

I'll write again soon.

Sirius

Harry looked eagerly inside the envelope. There was another piece of parchment in there. He read it through quickly and felt suddenly as warm and contented as though he'd swallowed a bottle of hot butterbeer in one gulp.

I, Sirius Black, Harry Potter's godfather, hereby give him permission to visit Hogsmeade on weekends.

"That'll be good enough for Dumbledore!" said Harry happily. He looked back at Sirius's letter.

"Hang on, there's a P.S. . . ."

I thought your friend Ron might like to keep this owl, as it's my fault he no longer has a rat.

Ron's eyes widened. The minute owl was still hooting excitedly.

"Keep him?" he said uncertainly. He looked closely at the owl for a moment; then, to Harry's and Hermione's great surprise, he held him out for Crookshanks to sniff.

"What d'you reckon?" Ron asked the cat. "Definitely an owl?"

Crookshanks purred.

"That's good enough for me," said Ron happily. "He's mine."

Harry read and reread the letter from Sirius all the way back into King's Cross station. It was still clutched tightly in his hand as he, Ron, and Hermione stepped back through the barrier of platform nine

and three-quarters. Harry spotted Uncle Vernon at once. He was standing a good distance from Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, eyeing them suspiciously, and when Mrs. Weasley hugged Harry in greeting, his worst suspicions about them seemed confirmed.

"I'll call about the World Cup!" Ron yelled after Harry as Harry bid him and Hermione good-bye, then wheeled the trolley bearing his trunk and Hedwig's cage toward Uncle Vernon, who greeted him in his usual fashion.

"What's that?" he snarled, staring at the envelope Harry was still clutching in his hand. "If it's another form for me to sign, you've got another —"

"It's not," said Harry cheerfully. "It's a letter from my godfather."

"Godfather?" spluttered Uncle Vernon. "You haven't got a godfather!"

"Yes, I have," said Harry brightly. "He was my mum and dad's best friend. He's a convicted murderer, but he's broken out of Wizard prison and he's on the run. He likes to keep in touch with me, though . . . keep up with my news . . . check if I'm happy. . . ."

And, grinning broadly at the look of horror on Uncle Vernon's face, Harry set off toward the station exit, Hedwig rattling along in front of him, for what looked like a much better summer than the last.

Nog Uilepos

“Harry!”

Hermien trek aan sy mou en staar na haar horlosie. “Ons het presies tien minute om in die siekeboeg terug te kom sonder dat iemand ons sien – voor Dompeldorius die deur toesluit –”

“Goed,” sê Harry terwyl hy sy oë met moeite van die hemel af weskleur, “kom ons waai . . .”

Hulle glip deur die poort agter hulle en af met ’n smal wenteltrap van klip. Toe hulle onder kom, hoor hulle stemme. Hulle smeer hulself plat teen die muur en luister. Dit klink soos Broddelwerk en Snerp wat haastig met die gang aan die voet van die trappe langs loop.

“ . . . kan net hoop dat Dompeldorius nie moeilikheid gaan maak nie,” sê Snerp. “Die Kus gaan onmiddellik toegepas word, nè?”

“Sodra Macnair terugkom met die Dementors. Hierdie hele Swardt-aangeleentheid was ’n yslike verleentheid. Ek kan nie vir jou sê hoe ek daarna uitsien om die *Daaglikse Profeet* in kennis te stel dat ons hom uiteindelik gevang het nie . . . Ek verstout my om te sê dat hulle sekerlik ’n onderhoud met jou sal wil voer, Snerp . . . en sodra klein Harry weer by sy volle positiewe is, is ek seker dat hy die *Daaglikse Profeet* graag sal wil vertel presies hoe jy sy lewe gered het . . .”

Harry kners op sy tande. Hy kry ’n glimp van Snerp se grynsag toe hy en Broddelwerk verby Harry en Hermien se skuilplek stap. Hul voetstap-
pe sterf weg. Harry en Hermien wag ’n paar oomblikke om seker te maak dat hulle inderdaad weg is, toe trek hulle weg en hardloop in die teenoorgestelde rigting. Af met een stel trappe, dan nog een, met ’n ander gang af – dan hoor hulle meteens ’n kekkellaggie.

“Nurks!” mompel Harry en gryp Hermien aan die pols. “Hier!”

Net betyds storm hulle ’n verlate klaskamer net links van hulle binne. Nurks moet in ’n uitstekende bui wees. Hy gaan bons-bons af in die gang en klink asof hy homself so amper slap wil lag.

“Oe, maar hy’s aaklig,” fluister Hermien met haar oor teen die deur. “Ek wed hy’s opgewondê oor wat die Dementors aan Sirius gaan doen . . .” Sy kyk na haar horlosie. “Nog drie minute, Harry!”

Hulle wag tot Nurks se vermakerige stem in die verte verdwyn het, toe glip hulle uit die vertrek en laat spaander.

"Hermien – wat sal gebeur – as ons nie terug is – voor Dompeldorius die deur toesluit nie?" vra Harry hygend.

"Ek wil nie daaraan dink nie," kreun Hermien en loer weer na haar horlosie. "Nog een minuut!"

Hulle bereik die end van die gang by die siekeboegdeur. "Oukei, ek kan Dompeldorius hoor," sê Hermien gespanne. "Komaan, Harry!"

Nou kruip hulle af in die gang. Voor hulle gaan die siekeboeg se deur oop. Dompeldorius se rug verskyn.

"Ek gaan julle nou opsluit," hoor hulle hom sê. "Dit is vyf minute voor middernag. Juffrou La Grange, drie draaie behoort genoeg te wees. Sterkte."

Nog met sy rug op hulle gekeer, kom Dompeldorius uit die vertrek, maak die deur toe en lig sy towerstaf om dit toe te toor. Harry en Hermien hardloop paniekbevange nader. Dompeldorius kyk op en 'n bree glimlag verskyn onder sy lang, silwer moestas. "Wel?" sê hy sag.

"Ons het dit reggekry!" sê Harry uitasem. "Sirius is weg, op Bokbok . . ." Dompeldorius glimlag stralend vir hom.

"Knap gedaan. Ek dink –" hy luister aandagtig of daar enige geluide van binne die siekeboeg kom. "Ja, ek dink julle is ook weg. Gaan gou in – ek sal julle toesluit –"

Harry en Hermien glip die siekeboeg binne. Dit is leeg, buiten Ron wat nog steeds roerloos op die verste bed lê. Toe die deur agter hulle toeklik, kruip Harry en Hermien terug in hul beddens en Hermien druk die Tyddraaier onder haar kleed in. Die volgende oomblik kom Madame Pomfrey van haar kantoor af aangestap.

"Het ek die skoolhoof hoor gaan? Het ek verlof om weer na my pasiënte om te sien?"

Sy is in 'n baie slegte bui. Harry en Hermien dink dit goed om hul sjokolade sonder teenpraatjies by haar te neem. Madame Pomfrey staan langs hulle om seker te maak dat hulle dit eet. Harry kan egter skaars sluk. Hy en Hermien wag en luister die hele tyd, hul senuwees is aan flarde . . . En dan, net toe Madame Pomfrey 'n vierde stuk sjokolade vir hulle gee, hoor hulle iewers bo hulle 'n gebrul van woede wat van ver af weergalm . . .

"Wat was dit?" sê Madame Pomfrey geskok.

Hulle hoor kwaai stemme wat harder en harder word. Madame Pomfrey staar na die deur.

"Regtig – hulle sal almal wakker raas! Wat dink hulle doen hulle?"

Harry doen sy bes om te hoor wat die stemme sê. Hulle kom al nader –

"Hy moet gedisappareer het, Severus, ons moes iemand daar by hom in die kamer gelos het. As dit moet uitkom –"

“HY HET NIE GEDISAPPAREER NIE!” brul Snerp, nou van baie naby af. “N MENS KAN NIE BINNE-IN HIERDIE KASTEEL APPAREER OF DISAPPAREER NIE! DIT – HET – IETS – MET – POTTER – TE – DOEN!”

“Severus – wees redelik – Harry is toegesluit –”

KAZAMMA

Die siekeboek se deur bars oop.

Broddelwerk, Snerp en Dompeldorius stap die slaapsaal binne. Net Dompeldorius lyk bedaar. Om die waarheid te sê, dit lyk asof hy homself gate uit geniet. Broddelwerk lyk kwaad. Snerp is egter buite homself.

“UIT DAARMEE, POTTER!” bulder hy. “WAT HET JY AANGEVANG?”

“Professor Snerp!” gil Madame Pomfrey. “Beheer jouself!”

“Kyk hier, Snerp, wees redelik,” sê Broddelwerk. “Hierdie deur was gesluit, ons het tog so pas self gesien –”

“HULLE HET HOM GEHELP OM TE ONTSNAP, EK WEET DIT!” skreeu Snerp terwyl hy na Harry en Hermien wys. Sy gesig is vertrek en die spoeg spat uit sy mond.

“Bedaar, man, bedaar!” blaf Broddelwerk. “Jy praat louter twak!”

“JY KEN NIE VIR POTTER NIE!” gil Snerp. “DIS HY, EK WEET DIS HY WAT DIT GEDOEN HET –”

“Dis genoeg, Severus,” sê Dompeldorius rustig. “Dink ’n bietjie na oor wat jy daar sê. Hierdie deur is nog die hele tyd gesluit sedert ek tien minute gelede hier uit is. Madame Pomfrey, het hierdie studente uit hul beddens geklim?”

“Natuurlik nie!” sê Madame Pomfrey vererg. “Ek is nog die hele tyd hier by hulle vandat u hier uit is.”

“Wel, daar het jy dit, Severus,” sê Dompeldorius kalm. “Tensy jy probeer insinueer dat Harry en Hermien tegelykertyd op twee plekke kan wees, reken ek ons hoef hulle regtig nie langer te pla nie.”

Siedend van woede staar Snerp van Broddelwerk, wat erg geskok oor sy gedrag lyk, na Dompeldorius, wie se oë agter hul brilglase skitter. Dan swaai Snerp om sodat sy klee om hom warrel en storm uit die saal.

“Die man kom so ietwat ongebalanseerd voor,” sê Broddelwerk terwyl hy hom agterna kyk. “Ek sal hom dophou as ek jy is, Dompeldorius.”

“Ag, hy’s nie so danig ongebalanseerd nie,” sê Dompeldorius rustig. “Hy’s net diep teleurgesteld.”

“Hy’s nie al nie!” sê Broddelwerk blasend. “Die *Daaglikse Profeet* sal hulself te buite gaan! Ons het vir Swardt vasgetrek en hy het sowaar weer deur ons vingers geglip! Nou moet die storie oor die Hippogrief se ontsnapping net ook nog uitlek, dan sal ek omtrent uitgejou word! Wel, ek moet die Ministerie in kennis stel . . .”

“En die Dementors?” sê Dompeldorius. “Ek aanvaar dat hulle van die skoolterrein verwyder sal word?”

“O, ja, hulle moet gaan,” sê Broddelwerk en trek sy vingers afgetrokke deur sy hare. “Het nooit kon droom dat hulle sal probeer om die Kus op ’n onskuldige kind toe te pas nie . . . heeltetal buite beheer. Nee, ek sal hulle vannag nog terug Azkaban toe stuur. Dalk moet ons drake voor by die hekke oorweeg . . .”

“Hagrid sal daarvan hou,” sê Dompeldorius met ’n vinnige glimlag vir Harry en Hermien. Toe hy en Broddelwerk die siekeboeg verlaat, haas Madame Pomfrey haar na die deur en sluit dit weer toe. Toe stap sy brom-brom terug na haar kantoor.

’n Lae gekreun klink van die oorkant van die siekeboeg af op. Ron het bygekom. Hulle sien hoe hy regop kom, sy kop vryf en om hom kyk.

“Wat – wat het gebeur?” vra hy steunend. “Harry? Wat maak ons hier? Waar is Sirius? Waar is Lupin? Wat gaan aan?”

Harry en Hermien kyk na mekaar.

“Verduidelik jy,” sê Harry terwyl hy nog ’n stuk sjokolade vat.

Toe Harry, Ron en Hermien die siekeboeg teen twaalfuur die volgende middag verlaat, is die kasteel so te sê verlate. Die broeiende hitte en die einde van die eksamen het gesorg dat almal vir die dag Hogsmeade toe is. Nóg Ron, nóg Hermien was lus om te gaan, dus dwaal hulle en Harry op die terrein rond en praat oor die buitengewone gebeure van die vorige nag terwyl hulle wonder waar Sirius en Bokbok nou is. Hulle gaan sit langs die meer en kyk hoe die reusagtige inkvis sy tentakels luiweg oor die waters beweeg. Harry verloor die draad van die gesprek heeltetal terwyl hy na die oorkantste wal staar. Die takbok het die vorige nag van daar af na hom toe gekom . . .

’n Skaduwee val oor hulle en toe hulle hul oë lig, sien hulle ’n druipogige Hagrid wat die sweet met ’n sakdoek so groot soos ’n tafeldoek van sy gesig afvee, en stralend na hulle kyk.

“Weet ek moenie bly wees na alles wat laas nag gebeur het nie,” sê hy, “ek meen, Swardt wat weer ontsnap het en alles – maar, raai wat?”

“Wat?” sê hulle en probeer nuuskierig lyk.

“Bokkie! Hy’t ontsnap! Hy’s vry! Vier nog die hele nag fees!”

“Dis wonderlik!” sê Hermien en kyk vermanend na Ron wat lyk asof hy enige oomblik gaan uitbars van die lag.

“Jip . . . ek’t hom seker nie goed genoeg vasgemaak nie,” sê Hagrid, terwyl hy vol vreugde oor die terrein staar. “Was vanoggend baie bekommerd . . . gedog hy kon dalk vir professor Lupin in die Woud raakgeloop het, maar Lupin sê hy’t gis’taand niks geëet nie . . .”

“Wat?” sê Harry vinnig.

“Vervlaks, weet julle dan nie?” sê Hagrid en sy glimlag vervaag so ietwat. Hy laat sak sy stem, selfs al is daar niemand in sig nie. “H’m – Snerp het vanoggend vir al die Slibberins gesê . . . gedog almal weet . . . pro-

fessor Lupin is 'n weerwolf, sien. En hy was gis'traand los op die terrein. Hy pak natuurlik nou in."

"Hy pak in?" sê Harry geskok. "Hoekom?"

"Loop, wat anders?" sê Hagrid en hy lyk verbaas dat Harry vra. "Vanoggend vroeg bedank. Sê hy kan nie die risiko neem nie, netnou gebeur dit weer."

Harry skarrel orent.

"Ek gaan hom sien," sê hy vir Ron en Hermien.

"Maar as hy bedank het –"

"– klink nie of daar iets is wat ons kan doen nie –"

"Dit traak my nie. Ek wil hom nog steeds sien. Ek kry julle later weer hier."

Lupin se kantoordeur staan oop. Hy het die meeste van sy goed reeds ingepak. Die Grindeloog se lê tenk staan langs sy gehawende ou tas, wat oop en so te sê vol is. Lupin staan gebukkend oor iets wat voor hom op sy lessenaar lê en kyk eers op toe Harry aan die deur klop.

"Ek het jou sien kom," sê Lupin glimlaggend. Hy wys na die perkament waarna hy gekyk het. Dit is die Plunderaar se Kaart.

"Ek het nou net vir Hagrid gesien," sê Harry. "Hy sê dat u bedank het. Dis nie waar nie, of is dit?"

"Ek is bevrees dit is," sê Lupin. Hy trek sy lessenaar se laaie oop en maak dit leeg.

"Hoekom?" sê Harry. "Die Ministerie vir Towerkuns dink darem seker nie dat u vir Sirius gehelp het nie, of hoe?"

Lupin stap na die deur en maak dit agter Harry toe.

"Nee. Professor Dompeldorius het daarin geslaag om Broddelwerk te oortuig dat ek probeer het om jul lêwens te red." Hy sug. "Dit moes die laaste strooi vir Severus gewees het. Ek dink die verlies van die Orde van Merlin het hom diep getref. Gevolglik het hy vanoggend aan die ontbyttafel – h'm – *per ongeluk* laat glip dat ek 'n weerwolf is."

"U gaan darem seker nie net daaroor weg nie!" sê Harry.

Lupin glimlag wrang.

"Teen môreoggend hierdie tyd sal die uile begin instroom van ouers wat nie wil hê dat 'n weerwolf hul kinders moet onderrig nie, Harry. En na laas nag kan ek hul punt insien. Ek kon enigeen van julle gebyt het dit mag nooit weer gebeur nie."

"U is die beste onderwyser vir Verdediging teen die Donker Kunste wat ons nog ooit gehad het!" sê Harry. "Moenie weggaan nie!"

Lupin skud sy kop en antwoord nie. Hy gaan voort om sy laaie leeg te maak. Toe, terwyl Harry nog aan 'n goeie rede probeer dink wat hom sal dwing om te bly, sê Lupin, "Volgens wat die skoolhoof vanoggend vir my gesê het, het jy laas nag 'n klomp lêwens gered, Harry. As daar iets is

waarop ek trots is, dan is dit dat jy so baie geleer het. Vertel my van jou Patronus."

"Hoe weet u daarvan?" sê Harry afgetrokke.

"Wat anders kon die Dementors afgeweer het?"

Harry vertel vir Lupin wat gebeur het. Toe hy klaar is, glimlag Lupin weer.

"Ja, jou pa het altyd 'n takbok geword wanneer hy getransformeer het," sê hy. "Jy het reg geraai . . . dis hoekom ons hom Gaffel genoem het."

Lupin gooi die laaste paar boeke in sy tas, stoot die laaie toe en kyk om na waar Harry is.

"Hierso – ek het dit laas nag van die Kermende Krot af gebring," sê hy en gee die onsigbaarheidsmantel vir Harry terug. "En . . ." Hy aarsel, dan hou hy die Plunderaar se Kaart ook uit. "Ek is nie meer een van jou onderwysers nie, dus voel ek glad nie skuldig om ook *dit* vir jou terug te gee nie. Ek kan tog niks daarmee maak nie, maar ek is seker dat dit nog vir jou, Ron en Hermien handig te pas sal kom."

Harry neem die kaart en grinnik.

"U het vir my gesê dat Maantjie, Wurmstert, Kussingvoet en Gaffel my uit die skool sou wou lok . . . u't gesê hulle sou dink dat dit snaaks is."

"En ons sou so gedink het," sê Lupin wat nou sy tas toemaak. "Ek verstout my om te sê dat James diep teleurgesteld sou gewees het as sy seun nooit enige van die geheime tunnels in die kasteel gevind het nie."

Daar is 'n klop aan die deur. Harry steek die Plunderaar se Kaart en die onsigbaarheidsmantel vinnig in sy sak.

Dit is professor Dompeldorius. Hy lyk glad nie verbaas om Harry daar te sien nie.

"Jou koets is by die hek, Remus," sê hy.

"Dankie, meneer die hoof."

Lupin tel sy ou tas en die Grindeloog se leë tenk op.

"Wel – tot siens, Harry," sê hy glimlaggend: "Dit was 'n plesier om vir jou skool te hou. Ek is seker ons sal mekaar weer eendag raakloop. Meneer die hoof, dis werklik nie nodig om my by die hek af te sien nie, ek sal regkom . . ."

Harry kry die indruk dat Lupin so gou moontlik wil wegkom.

"Tot siens dan, Remus," sê Dompeldorius bedaard. Lupin skuif die Grindeloog se tenk effens sodat hy en Dompeldorius kan hand skud. Toe, met 'n laaste knik na Harry en 'n vlugtige glimlag, verlaat Lupin die kantoor.

Harry gaan sit in Lupin se stoel en staar bedruk na die vloer. Hy hoor hoe die deur toegaan en kyk op. Dompeldorius is egter nog steeds daar.

"Hoekom so mistroostig, Harry?" sê hy sag. "Na laas nag behoort jy baie trots op jouself te wees."

"Dit het geen verskil gemaak nie," sê Harry bitter. "Pansegrouw het weggekom."

“Geen verskil nie?” sê Dompeldorius. “Dit het al die verskil in die wêreld gemaak, Harry. Jy het gehelp om die waarheid bloot te lê. Jy het ’n onskuldige man van ’n vreeslike lot gered.”

Vreeslik. Iewers roer iets in Harry se geheue. Groter en vreesliker as ooit tevore . . . professor Trelawney se voorspelling!

“Professor Dompeldorius – gister toe ek die Waarsê-eksamen moes doen, het professor Trelawney baie – baie snaaks geraak.”

“Inderdaad?” sê Dompeldorius. “H’m – snaakser as gewoonlik, bedoel jy?”

“Ja . . . haar stem het so diep geword en haar oë het gerol en toe’t sy gesê . . . sy’t gesê dat Woldemort se dienskneg voor middernag na hom sou terugkeer . . . sy’t gesê die dienskneg sal hom help om weer sy mag te herwin.” Harry kyk op na Dompeldorius. “En toe’t sy weer soort van normaal geraak en sy kon niks onthou van wat sy gesê het nie. Was dit – het sy regtig ’n voorspelling gemaak?”

Dompeldorius lyk ligweg beïndruk.

“Weet jy, Harry, ek dink sy het dalk,” sê hy peinsend. “Wie sou dit kon dink! Dit bring haar totaal van voorspellings op twee te staan. Ek sal haar salaris moet verhoog . . .”

“Maar –” Harry kyk geskok na hom. Hoe kan Dompeldorius so kalm wees daaroor?

“Maar – ek het gekeer dat Sirius en professor Lupin vir Pansegrouw doodmaak! Dit sal alles my skuld wees as Woldemort moet terugkom!”

“Dit sal nie,” sê Dompeldorius bedaard. “Het jou ondervinding met die Tyddraaier jou dan niks geleer nie, Harry? Die gevolge van ons handelinge is dikwels so gekompliseerd, so uiteenlopend dat dit inderdaad baie moeilik is om die toekoms te voorspel! . . . professor Trelawney, grote genade, is ’n lewende bewys hiervan. Jy het ’n edele ding gedoen toe jy Pansegrouw se lewe gered het.”

“Maar as hy vir Woldemort help om weer magtig te word –!”

“Pansegrouw is sy lewe aan jou verskuldig. Jy het vir Woldemort ’n afgesant gestuur wat by jou in die skuld is. Wanneer een towenaar ’n ander towenaar se lewe red, skep dit ’n sekere band tussen hulle . . . en ek sal baie verbaas wees as Woldemort ’n dienskneg wil hê wat by Harry Potter in die skuld is.”

“Ek wil nie ’n band met Pansegrouw hê nie!” sê Harry. “Hy’t my ouers verraai!”

“Dit is die towerkuns op sy diepste, op sy mees ondeurgrondelike, Harry. Maar glo my . . . die tyd mag dalk kom wanneer jy baie bly sal wees dat jy Pansegrouw se lewe gered het.”

Harry kan nie dink wanneer dit sal wees nie. Dompeldorius lyk asof hy weet hoe Harry voel.

“Ek het jou pa baie goed geken, sowel op Hogwarts as later, Harry,” sê

hy sag. "Hy sou ook Pansegrouw se lewe gered het, daarvan is ek seker."

Harry kyk op in sy gesig. Dompeldorius sal nie lag nie – hy kan vir Dompeldorius vertel . . .

"Laas nag . . . ek het gedink dit was my pa wat die Patronus opgetower het. Ek bedoel, toe ek myself aan die oorkant van die meer gesien het . . . het ek gedink dat ek hom sien."

"n Maklike fout om te maak," sê Dompeldorius sag. "Jy is seker al moeg daarvan om dit te hoor, maar jy lyk besonder baie soos James. Behalwe jou oë . . . jy het jou moeder se oë."

Harry skud sy kop.

"Dit was simpel om te dink dat dit hy was," mompel hy. "Ek bedoel, ek weet tog dat hy dood is."

"Dink jy dan dat diegene wat dood is ons vir altyd verlaat het? Dink jy dat ons hulle nie nog helderder onthou wanneer ons in die moeilikheid is nie? Jou pa lewe in jou, Harry, en hy wys homself op sy duidelikste wanneer jy hom nodig het. Hoe anders kon jy daardie spesifieke Patronus opgetower het? Gaffel het laas nag weer galop, Harry."

Dit neem 'n rukkie voor Harry besef wat Dompeldorius gesê het.

"Sirius het gisteraand vir my vertel hoe hulle Animagi geword het," sê Dompeldorius met 'n glimlag. "n Uitsonderlike prestasie – en dat hulle dit sowaar vir my geheim kon hou! Ek onthou die sonderlinge vorm wat jou Patronus aangeneem het die dag toe dit mnr. Malfoy tydens die Kwiddiekwedstryd teen Raweklou bestorm het. Jy het jou pa laas nag gesien, Harry . . . jy het hom binne-in jouself gevind."

Toe verlaat Dompeldorius die kantoor terwyl Harry met 'n warboel gedagtes agterbly.

Niemand op Hogwarts het ooit gehoor presies wat gebeur het die nag toe Sirius, Bokbok en Pansegrouw verdwyn het nie, behalwe Harry, Ron, Hermien en professor Dompeldorius. Soos die kwartaal aangestap het einde toe, het Harry verskeie teorieë gehoor oor wat nou eintlik gebeur het, maar nie een van hulle het naby die waarheid gekom nie.

Malfoy was woedend oor Bokbok. Hy was oortuig dat Hagrid 'n manier gevind het om die Hippogrief na veiligheid te smokkel en hy was hoogs verontwaardig dat hy en sy pa deur 'n blote boswagter uitoorlê is. Percy Weasley het op sy beurt heelwat oor Sirius se ontsnapping te sê gehad.

"As ek daarin sou slaag om by die Ministerie werk te kry, sal ek 'n hele aantal voorstelle oor Magiese Wetstoepassing maak!" vertel hy aan die enigste persoon wat wil luister – sy meisie, Penelope.

Hoewel die weer volmaak is, hoewel die atmosfeer opgetoë is, hoewel hy weet dat hy die feitlik onmoontlike reggekry het deur vir Sirius na vryheid te help, het Harry nog nooit tevore aan die einde van die skooljaar presies so terneergedruk gevoel nie.

Hy is gewis nie die enigste een wat spyt was om professor Lupin te sien gaan nie. Harry se hele Verdediging teen die Donker Kunste-klas is omgekrap oor sy bedanking.

“Wonder wat hulle volgende jaar vir ons gaan gee?” sê Septimus Floris bedruk.

“Dalk ’n vampier,” stel Dean Thomas hoopvol voor.

Dit is nie net professor Lupin se vertrek wat swaar op Harry se gemoed rus nie. Hy kan nie anders as om dikwels aan professor Trelawney se voorspelling te dink nie. Hy hou aan wonder waar Pansegrouw is en of hy reeds by Woldemort skuiling gesoek het. Maar die ding wat Harry die neerslagtigste maak, is die besef dat hy weer na die Dursleys moet gaan. Vir ’n goeie halfuur het hy geglo dat hy in die toekoms by Sirius sal gaan bly . . . sy ouers se beste vriend . . . die naasbeste ding, amper so goed as om sy pa terug te kry. En hoewel geen nuus van Sirius af beslis goeie nuus is omdat dit beteken dat hy veilig weggekom het, kan Harry nie anders as om mistroostig te voel as hy dink aan die huis wat hy so amper gehad het en die feit dat dit nou buite bereik is nie.

Die eksamenuitslae kom op die laaste dag van die kwartaal. Harry, Ron en Hermien het in elke vak geslaag. Tot Harry se verbasing het hy ook Towerdrankies deurgekom. Hy het egter ’n spesmaas dat Dompeldorius ingegryp en gekeer het dat Snerp hom aspris laat druip. Tydens die laaste week was Snerp se gedrag teenoor Harry werklik skokkend. Harry het nie kon droom dat dit vir Snerp moontlik kan wees om nog minder van hom te hou nie, maar dit is so. ’n Spiertjie trek onplesierig in die hoek van Snerp se dun mond elke keer dat hy na Harry kyk, en hy strek sy vingers die hele tyd asof hulle jeuk om Harry se nek om te draai.

Percy het sy topgraad OTTE behaal en Fred en George het elk ’n hand vol Uile bymekaar geskraap. Huis Griffindor het die huiskampioenskap vir die derde agtereenvolgende jaar gewen, grootliks danksy hul aanskoulike vertoning tydens die Kwiddiek-eindstryd. Dit beteken dat die fees aan die einde van die jaar te midde van skarlakenrooi en goue versierings plaasgevind het, en dat die Griffindortafel die raserigste van almal was. Harry het tot daarin geslaag om van die volgende dag se rit na die Dursleys te vergeet terwyl hy saam met die ander geëet, gedrink, gelag en gesels het.

Toe die Hogwarts Express die volgende oggend uit die stasie wegtrek, gee Hermien en Ron vir Harry verbasende nuus.

“Ek het vanoggend voor ete vir professor McGonagall gaan sien. Ek het besluit om Moggelstudies te los.”

“Maar jy het driehonderd-en-twintig persent daarvoor gehad!” sê Ron.

“Ek weet,” sug Hermien, “maar ek sal nie nog ’n jaar soos vanjaar kan vat nie. Daardie Tyddraaier het my mal gemaak. Ek het dit teruggegee.

Sonder Moggelstudies en Waarsêery sal ek weer 'n normale rooster hê."

"Ek kan nog steeds nie glo dat jy niks vir ons gesê het nie," sê Ron omgekrap. "Ons is dan kamma jou vriende."

"Ek het *belowe* om vir niemand te sê nie," sê Hermien streng. Sy kyk na Harry wat kyk hoe Hogwarts agter 'n berg inskuif en dan buite sig verdwyn. Twee volle maande voor hy dit weer sal sien . . .

"Ag, Harry, kom by!" sê Hermien bedruk.

"Ek's oukei," sê Harry vinnig. "Dink maar net aan die vakansie."

"Jip, ek het ook daaraan gedink," sê Ron. "Harry, jy móét net na ons toe kom. Ek sal alles met my ma en pa reël en dan sal ek jou bel. Ek weet nou hoe om 'n feleton te gebruik –"

"'n *Telefoon*, Ron," sê Hermien. "Jissie, jy moet volgende jaar 'n bietjie Moggelstudies doen . . ."

Ron steur hom nie aan haar nie.

"Dis hierdie somer die Kwiddiek Wêreldbeker! Wat sê jy, Harry? Kom kuier, dan gaan kyk ons! My pa kry gewoonlik kaartjies deur die werk."

Hierdie voorstel kikker Harry dadelik op.

"Ja . . . ek skat die Dursleys sal seker bly wees om my te laat gaan . . . veral na wat ek aan tant Marge gedoen het."

Harry voel nou aansienlik beter en speel 'n paar potte Ontploffkaart saam met Hermien en Ron. Toe die heks later met die teetrollie opdaag, koop hy vir homself 'n yslike middagete, maar niks wat sjokolade in het nie.

Dit is egter eers heelwat later die middag dat die ding wat hom werklik bly maak, gebeur.

"Harry," sê Hermien skielik terwyl sy oor sy skouer kyk. "Wat is daardie ding daar buite voor jou venster?"

Harry draai om en kyk. Iets wat baie klein en grys is, verskyn en verdwyn om die beurt voor die ruit. Hy staan op om beter te sien en sien 'n baie klein uiltjie met 'n brief wat hopeloos te groot vir hom is. Die uil is so klein dat dit in die lug bolmakiesie slaan en deur die trein se warrelstroom rondgegooi word. Harry skuif die venster vinnig oop en steek sy hand uit om dit te vang. Dit voel net soos 'n baie donsige Snip. Hy bring dit versigtig binnetoe. Die uiltjie laat die brief op Harry se sitplek val en vlieg dan al in die rondte in hul kompartement. Dit is duidelik dat hy baie in sy skik is met die taak wat hy so pas afgehandel het. Hedwig klik haar snawel op 'n waardige manier om te wys dat sy dié gedrag afkeur. Kromskeen gaan sit regop op sy bank en volg die uiltjie met sy groot geel oë. Toe Ron dit merk, gryp hy die uiltjie en hou hom veilig buite bereik.

Harry tel die brief op. Dit is aan hom geadresseer. Hy skeur die koevert oop en skree, "Dis van Sirius!"

"Wat?" sê Ron en Hermien opgewonde. "Lees dit hardop!"

Liewe Harry,

Ek hoop dit bereik jou voor jy by jou oom en tante kom. Ek weet nie of hulle aan uilepos gewoond is nie.

Ek en Bokbok het 'n veilige skuilplek gekry. Ek gaan nie vir jou sê waar dit is nie, ingeval hierdie brief in die verkeerde hande beland. Ek het ook my bedenkinge oor hierdie uil se betroubaarheid, maar dis al waarop ek my hande kon lê en hy was baie gretig om die werk te doen.

Ek verneem dat die Dementors nog steeds na my soek, maar hulle sal my nooit hier kry nie. Ek beplan om 'n paar Moggels toe te laat om my iewers ver van Hogwarts af te sien sodat die sekuriteit op die kasteel gelig kan word.

Daar is nog iets wat ek nie tydens ons kort ontmoeting vir jou kon sê nie. Dit was ek wat die Vuurslag vir jou gestuur het –

“Ha!” sê Hermien triomfantlik. “Sien! Ek het mos gesê dit was hy!”

“Ja, maar hy het dit nie vervloek nie, het hy?” sê Ron. “Eina!”

Die klein uiltjie, wat nou dolgelukkig in sy hand sit en hoe-hoe, het hom ewe liefderik aan die vinger gebyt.

Kromskeen het die bestelling namens my na die Uilekantoor geneem. Ek het jou naam gebruik, maar het gesê dat hulle die goud uit Edelgoltkluisnommer sewehonderd-en-elf moet haal – my eie. Beskou dit asseblief as dertien jaar se verjaardagspesente van jou peetpa af.

Ek wil ook verskoning vra dat ek jou so laat skrik het daardie nag toe jy van jou oom se huis af weg is. Ek het bloot gehoop om 'n glimp van jou te kry voor ek op my reis na die noorde vertrek, maar ek dink dit was vir jou 'n groot skok toe jy my gesien het.

Ek sluit ook iets anders vir jou in. Ek dink dit sal jou volgende jaar in Hogwarts baie lekkerder maak.

As jy my ooit nodig het, moet jy my net laat weet. Jou uil sal my vind.

Ek sal gou weer skryf.

Sirius.

Harry kyk gretig in die koevert. Daar is nog 'n stuk perkament daar binne. Hy lees dit vinnig deur en voel skielik so warm soos wanneer 'n mens 'n hele bottel vol Botterbier met een sluk gedrink het.

Ek, Sirius Swardt, Harry Potter se peetpa, gee hiermee toestemming dat hy naweke na Hogsmeade mag gaan.

“Dit sal goed genoeg vir Dompeldorius wees!” sê Harry in sy skik. Hy kyk weer na Sirius se brief.

“Wag 'n bietjie, hier's 'n naskrif . . .”

Ek het gedink dat jou vriend Ron dalk daarvan sal hou om hierdie uil vir hom te vat, siende dat dit my skuld is dat hy nie meer 'n rot het nie.

Ron se oë rek. Die klein uiltjie sit nog steeds opgewek en roep.

“Hom vir my vat?” sê hy onseker. Hy kyk meteens stip na die uiltjie en toe, tot Harry en Hermien se grootste verbasing, hou hy hom uit sodat Kromskeen aan hom kan ruik.

“Wat sê jy?” vra Ron vir die kat. “Sonder twyfel 'n uil?” Kromskeen spin.

“Dis goed genoeg vir my,” sê Ron tevrede. “Hy's myne.”

Die hele ent pad tot by King's Cross-stasie lees Harry Sirius se brief oor en oor. Dis nog steeds vasgekleem in sy hand toe hy, Ron en Hermien deur die versperring by platform nege-en-'n-driekwart stap. Harry sien oom Vernon dadelik raak. Hy staan 'n goeie ent van mnr. en mev. Weasley af en staar agterdogtig na hulle, en toe mev. Weasley vir Harry omhels, lyk dit asof sy ergste vrese bewaarheid is.

“Ek sal bel oor die Wêreldbeker!” gil Ron agter Harry aan nadat Harry vir hom en Hermien tot siens gesê het, en begin het om sy trollie met sy trommel en Hedwig se kou na oom Vernon te stoot, wat hom op die gewone manier begroet.

“Wat's dit?” snou hy en staar na die koevert wat Harry nog steeds in sy hand vashou. “As dit nog 'n vorm is wat ek moet teken, moet jy weer daaroor —”

“Dit is nie,” sê Harry vrolik. “Dis 'n brief van my peetpa af.”

“Peetpa?” sputter oom Vernon. “Jy het nie 'n peetpa nie!”

“Ja, ek het,” sê Harry stralend. “Hy was my ma en pa se beste vriend. Hy's ook 'n veroordeelde misdadiger, maar hy't uit die towenaarstronk ontsnap en is op vlug. Hy't gesê hy gaan kontak met my hou . . . wil op hoogte bly van wat met my aangaan . . . seker maak dat ek gelukkig is . . .”

En terwyl hy breed glimlag oor die gewalgde trek op oom Vernon se gesig, stap Harry na die stasie se uitgang terwyl Hedwig se kou voor hom op die trollie ratel. Dit lyk asof dit 'n baie beter somer as die vorige een gaan wees.